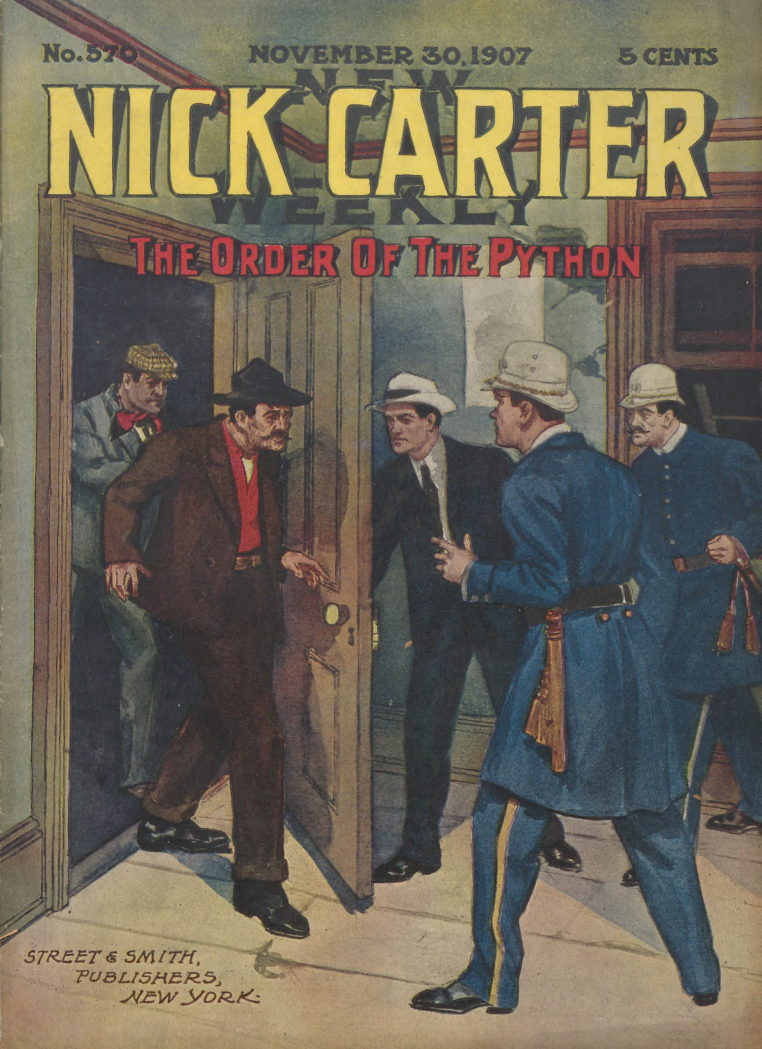
No. 570 NOVEMBER 30, 1907 5 CENTS

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE ORDER OF THE PYTHON



STREET & SMITH,
PUBLISHERS,
NEW YORK.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.*

No. 570. NEW YORK, November 30, 1907. Price Five Cents.

The Order of the Python;

OR,

NICK CARTER WORKS THE THIRD DEGREE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD MAN'S DREAMS.

Nick Carter sat facing a little, weazened old man, whose face, now that it was shaven and that his hair had been trimmed, indicated a high class of refinement, although the general bearing of the man was servile in the extreme.

The case which this little old man brought to the detective was a sad one indeed, inasmuch as it was one of utter loss of memory resulting from some accident that had occurred to him at a time of which he had no recollection.

The little old man was known only as "Cranky." It was the only name he remembered at all, and it had been given to him in derision because of his strangeness, his loss of memory, and his habit of muttering to himself, and dreaming dreams of former greatness, some of which he had told to those who knew him since he had lost that best thing that belongs to us.

The detective had found Cranky in a thieves' den, on the East Side, in New York.

In pursuing his case against the Criminal Trust, he had encountered Cranky.

The poor fellow was a sort of man-of-all-work there, at Mulvaney's Cover, as the place was called.

But he had befriended the detective, and aided him in the prosecution of his case, which had ended in the arrest of Pollock, the high chief of all the crooks.

Mulvaney's Cover had long been a notorious place, the resort of thieves and criminals of the worst sort, and the Criminal Trust had naturally selected it as a sort of headquarters for their operations.

The detective, in following them there, had run upon Cranky, and in return for favors done him by the strange old man had promised that he would help him to remember; that he would do what he could to restore him to his family.

Cranky had told the detective about "dreaming dreams," and he had recited some of them to Nick. They were dreams that always came to him with the sound of certain tunes, and so Nick had whistled one of those tunes to the old man, and then asked him to relate to him the visions it conjured up before him.

And now the time had come when he was to make good his promise to Cranky.

The criminal trust had not been broken up, to be sure; but its chief leader had been arrested and was now be-

hind the bars, awaiting the time when a regular charge should be made against him for the crimes he had committed. In the meantime, he was held on several lesser charges. But he was held, and that was sufficient for the present purposes of the detective.

Two of the principal leaders of the criminal trust had fallen into the clutches of the detective, and both were now in prison, but nevertheless Nick Carter had not yet learned the secrets of the organization, and he felt that that was necessary before he could hope to crush out the illegal combine altogether.

But here, in the midst of his work on the case, came Cranky—the Cranky to whom he had made a solemn promise; and it was one of the principles of Nick Carter's life never to break his word, always to keep religiously his promises.

He had given the old man his name and address, written on a card, before leaving the "Cover," and had told him to come at any time. Now, it was only the second day after Nick Carter, with the aid of Cranky and some police officers, had taken the chief of the trust from his bed at the Cover, and carried him away to prison, without his being any the wiser until he awakened in the morning; for, in making that arrest, Nick had made use of just sufficient chloroform to deaden the sensibilities of the man he took; and so it happened that while Pollock went to sleep in the bed that had been provided for him by Mulvaney, he awakened from his sleep on a cot in a prison-cell.

"I didn't expect you quite so soon, Cranky," said the detective, smiling kindly upon his strange client; "but you are welcome, and we will lose no time in seeing what can be done about your case."

"Thank you, sir," was the sad reply. "You see, Mr. Carter, I have been thinking, thinking, thinking all the time since I had that talk with you, and the desire to know who I am has returned to me with redoubled force. I could not wait another day without coming to you."

"I can understand how you feel," said the detective.

"I think my memory is coming back to me gradually, sir. I believe that in time I would know who I am. But most likely it might be too late. It would doubtless be when I was on my death-bed, and I might have no means of sending word to those I once loved."

"You have thought about our conversation on the subject, have you?"

"I have thought of almost nothing else, sir."

"Do you remember the 'dream' you told to me?"

"Perfectly."

"It came to you, like a recollection, vague, but nevertheless there, when you heard Asher's 'Alice' whistled or sung."

"Yes."

"Do you remember what you told me about it?"

"Perfectly."

"Let me see if I do."

"Yes."

"You told me that when you hear that particular tune, you seem to see a young woman seated at a piano, singing it. The scene is in a beautiful room, in a large and finely furnished home somewhere on the bank of a river, for from the window of it you can see down across the water, to a high bluff that rises beyond it. Is that right so far?"

"It is."

"On the river steamers are passing to and fro all the time. You can also hear the rumble and roar of railway trains, and taken altogether we decided, did we not, that the home you dream of must be somewhere on the bank of the Hudson, above New York?"

"That was your opinion, sir."

"It is your belief, is it not, that the young woman who plays and sings in your dream is your daughter?"

"I don't know. I am afraid to think that it is so—almost."

"Tell me exactly how it does seem to you."

"The young woman of my dream is some one I love, but whether she is my daughter or not, I cannot say. She is the daughter of some one whom I think well of. It seems to me sometimes that she is really my daughter."

"And you said something about the name, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What was that?"

"It seemed to me that her name was Alice, like the song; that she somehow bore the name of her mother; that her mother was dead, and that she resembles her. Hark! She is singing even now. I can hear her."

"Listen, then, and tell me about it."

"She turns toward me and smiles," continued the old man dreamily, and in a voice that was scarcely above a whisper. "Then she sings—oh, how sweetly she does sing! How beautiful she is! How her voice vibrates through the room. It is a rich contralto. But no, it is not exactly a contralto; rather a mezzo soprano; but it is beautiful. Oh, so beautiful!"

"Go on! Go on, old man!"

Cranky bent forward with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, and continued:

"She pauses now in her singing and rises. She turns toward me. She steps forward across the room. And now she stands before me, looking down upon me fondly. As if any one ever looked fondly upon me!"

"Many have, and many will, Cranky. Go on."

"That is all. The dream has faded now. It seemed as if she was about to kiss me, but the dream faded just before she could reach me to do so."

"Do they always do like that?"

"Always."

He sighed deeply and raised his eyes to Nick's again.

"Tell me of another song that brings dreams to you," suggested the detective.

"You know, I do not remember the names of them."

"Whistle one for me, then."

The old man hesitated a moment, and then began plaintively to whistle, "Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot?" and Nick watched him closely while he did it.

Cranky's face was a picture. There was a rapt expression upon it, impossible to describe. He seemed to be lifted out of himself, and to forget entirely his present surroundings.

When he stopped, Nick permitted the silence that followed it to continue for a moment; and then softly he began to whistle the air himself, still closely watching every expression, and every change of attitude that came to the old man.

At first he started; then he settled himself to listen, exactly as if he were in a room where the song was being sung for him. A rapt expression came into his eyes. A smile hovered upon his lips. After a moment two tears rolled softly down his withered cheeks, but he did not attempt to brush them away.

The detective allowed the tune to die away gradually and softly, and when it ceased he saw the old man lean forward and stretch out his hands, while he murmured, exactly as if he were addressing the words to some person who stood before him:

"Exactly like your mother. Exactly like your mother."

"Tell me about that dream, my friend," said the detective tenderly.

"It was 'Auld Lang Syne.' She sang it for me. Didn't you hear it?"

"Yes. But who sang it?"

"She did. Alice."

"The same Alice who sang the other song, a moment ago?"

"Yes. The same."

"Was it in the same room, in the same house, with the same view before the window?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

"In a house in the city, in a room that seems like a library. It is a large room, and there are many books around the walls. I seem to love these books, every one of them. They seem to be all mine."

"Describe the room more particularly."

"There is a picture over the fireplace—the picture of a woman who resembles Alice. It is her mother, and it seems—it seems——"

"Well?"

"It seems as if both belong to me; as if the house were mine; as if it is my daughter who sang, and that she sang the song exactly as her mother used to do before her."

"Tell me more," said the detective.

The old man opened his mouth as if to speak. Then he held up one hand, and said:

"Wait, wait."

"Don't wait," said Nick. "Tell me what you see, as it happens."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE.

But the dream faded, whatever it may have been, and Nick Carter was destined never to hear it, for the light faded out of the old man's eyes, the expression of utter happiness that had been in his face disappeared, and he returned to that look of solidity which meant nothing at all.

And the detective knew that now there would be no use in trying to stir up further memories in the mind of the old man, unless he could accomplish it by hitting upon some tune that would bring another vision before him.

He could not hope to do this by suggestion from Cranky himself, since he could not remember the names of the tunes that affected him; but Nick began softly to whistle nevertheless, hoping that by accident he would hit upon something presently that would produce an effect.

He left the old man seated where he was, and crossed to the window, where he stood in the shadow of the curtain. Then he whistled tune after tune, while he furtively watched his companion.

At first there was no effect, although the old man seemed to listen; he seemed indeed to follow each air carefully, and the detective had no doubt that Cranky had at some time had a thorough musical education, and that he had given his daughter one also.

Nick tried almost every song he knew, selecting the old ones, of course, but not one of them served the purpose, and he was almost in despair, when he happened to hit upon "Old Kentucky Home."

Instantly there was a change.

Cranky raised his head like an ancient war-horse that hears a long-forgotten bugle-call. He listened; he bent forward as if he were trying to peer at something; he brushed one hand across his face; and suddenly, in a high, quavering voice he began to sing the words to the accompaniment that the detective was whistling.

He sang them through, too, without a break, recalling the words perfectly, and, notwithstanding the imperfect timber of his voice, he gave an expression to the song that was intensely pathetic.

"I think I have hit upon the keynote at last," thought the detective to himself. "That song has made him remember at least the words, and more recollection should return to him with them."

When the song was finished Nick remained silent a moment, and then began it over again; and once more

the old man took up the words of the song and sang them through to the end without a mistake.

"Well, my friend," he said, when the song was finished, "tell me what that brings back to you."

"My childhood," was the instant reply. "It comes back to me very plainly indeed. I think my perceptions are growing clearer, sir. Don't you?"

"I am sure they are. Everything will come back to you after a time. We must not be impatient."

"No, sir. I will try not to be so."

"Tell me what you recollect of your childhood. Tell me what the song, with its tune and the words, bring back to you."

"My home. My father and mother. My brothers and sisters. There was a large family of us. Shall I tell it just as it seems to come to me now?"

"Yes."

"It may not be real, you know. It may be only another dream."

"Nevertheless, I wish you to tell it to me just exactly as you see it."

"I will try."

"Well?"

"It was before the war. I was a young man then, fully grown. My father was a Kentuckian; my mother a Northern woman. Oh, I can see it all very clearly indeed."

"Go on."

"I seemed to have been the youngest of the family and to have imbibed the ideas of my mother in regard to the approaching war, in which all believed the Yankees would soon be thoroughly whipped."

"Yes; I know that was generally the impression through the South before the war."

"I can remember that there were hot discussions in the family, in which I always took the side of my mother, while the other children—my brothers and sisters, it would seem—sided with the South."

"There were many families affected in that manner."

"I can see myself taking leave of all of them when I went to the war, for I went to the side of the North, while my brothers went to the side of the South; and I can even see that my sisters bade me a cold good-by, as if they could not forgive me for what I was doing."

"Well?"

"I don't think I ever saw them all again. My brothers and my father were killed in the war. My sisters married, and we became separated and estranged. And there the vision seems to end. There is no more to it. But when you whistled that song, it all came back to me."

"Don't you remember that your wife or your daughter used to sing that song to you?"

"Yes. I think I do."

"Have you ever tried to remember your name? I mean, have you tried very hard to do so?"

"I have, always."

"Have you tried the experiment of calling over a list of names—given names, I mean—to yourself, to discover if there was not one among them that seemed to belong to you?"

"No; I don't think I have done that."

"Shall we try it?"

"If you please—yes."

"Wait here a moment for me," said the detective, and he rose and left the room.

As soon as he was outside it, he placed himself so that he could see past the door, which he had purposely left partly open, and, looking back in upon the old man, he called out suddenly:

"Thomas? Thomas!"

The old man paid no attention.

"Sam? Samuel!"

There was no indication of any response; and after that the detective repeated one after another, name and name, until he had covered nearly the whole gamut; and then, as he was about to desist, he remembered one that he had not used.

"Henry? Henry! Oh, Henry!" he called.

At the first utterance of the name, the old man raised his head and listened. At the repetition of it, he bent forward as if to listen. At the third call, he partly started to his feet, and then sank back again upon the chair.

Nick waited a moment, and then called out:

"Henry? Henry Clay!"

The effect was instantaneous.

Cranky leaped to his feet and stood staring around him as if in search of the person who had called.

"Finish it," he called out wildly. "There is more to it; why don't you finish it?"

"You finish it for me," said the detective, reentering the room. "It is your name. You are Henry Clay somebody; who are you? Quick! Tell me! Henry Clay—*What?*"

"Parsons!" yelled the old man, and he leaped straight into the air and fell back upon the floor at full length, unconscious.

Nick lifted him tenderly and bore him to a couch, where he placed him as comfortably as possible; but he made no effort to hurry returning consciousness. He preferred that nature should take its own time to act.

But he watched him closely for all that, and the instant the old man opened his eyes, he leaned over him and said, in precisely the tone he would have used under the most conventional conditions:

"Well, Mr. Parsons, how are you feeling now?"

"Better, thank you," was the reply. "What has happened? Did I faint?"

"So it seemed. You are sure you are better, Mr. Parsons?"

"Oh, yes, much better, thank you again."

"No; don't try to rise," said the detective, restraining him as he attempted to do so. "It is better that you remain where you are for the present. Close your eyes and keep them closed while I ask you a few questions."

"Very good."

"Thank you. Now, will you keep them closed, and tightly, until I give you permission to open them?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where you are?"

"No. I have no idea as to that. I suppose an accident has happened to me. Is it not so, my good friend?"

Nick was delighted. The chord of memory had been touched, and now it was returning to him rapidly.

"Do you know who I am?" asked Nick then.

"No; I am sorry to say that I do not."

"You have no idea as to that?"

"No, sir. None."

"Nor how you got here?"

"No."

"What time did you leave home, Mr. Parsons?"

"Let me see. I have forgotten. Yes, it was immediately after breakfast this morning."

"Where did you go when you left your home, immediately after breakfast?"

"To the office of a friend of mine in the Mills Building."

"What is the name of that friend?"

"Pollock. James Pollock."

"Eh? James Pollock? Are you sure about that?"

"Certainly. I am very sure indeed."

"He has an office in that building?"

"Yes."

"What is his business?"

"He is a lawyer—and he has many interests down in the financial district. His law business is only very small. He does not try to practise at all, I believe, although I have heard that he takes some cases, as favors to his friends, for he is accounted a great lawyer."

"What did you do when you arrived at Pollock's office?"

"I sat down to wait for him. He was not in at the time."

"Did he come in, while you were waiting?"

"Yes."

"What happened after he came into the office? Did you go out with him?"

"Yes. But why are you asking me all these strange questions? What possible difference does it make about my seeing Pollock, and waiting for him? Why do you insist upon my keeping my eyes closed while you talk to me? and what has happened, anyway?"

"I will reply to all those questions after a little, Mr. Parsons; but for the present I will count it a very great favor if you will reply to mine without hesitancy. It is very important that you should do so. You have been injured, and the things that you remember now may disappear from your memory again presently. If that should happen, I want to be prepared for it. Will you help me all you can?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGE EFFECT OF A SONG.

"Your name is Parsons, isn't it? Henry Clay Parsons?" the detective continued.

"Yes."

"You have a daughter?"

"Yes; a daughter named Alice."

"And a wife?"

"I have lost my wife, sir."

"You spoke a moment ago of having left home immediately after breakfast this morning. Is that quite correct?"

"Yes."

"Where is your home?"

"In Seventy-second Street, near Riverside Drive. The number is—— I seem to have forgotten the number. Strange, that I should do such a thing as that, isn't it?"

"Never mind the number for the present. It is not important; at least, it is not important at the present moment."

"Very well."

"You have another home somewhere up the Hudson River, haven't you?"

"Yes. Near the Highlands."

"I thought so. Do you recall the name you have given to your home up there?"

"We call it 'Dreamland'."

"What do you mean by 'we'?"

"I refer to my daughter and myself. She named it, and we have always spoken of it since then as 'Dreamland.'"

"It is a very pretty name. Is your daughter there now, or is she in the city home with you?"

"She is in the city."

"Good. What month is it, Mr. Parsons?"

"Why, August, of course, although it does not seem as warm as it did this morning, does it?"

"No. It is considerably cooler. Do you remember the day of the month?"

"Certainly. It is the ninth."

"Good again. You are a promising patient, Mr. Parsons. Don't forget my injunction about keeping your eyes closed, will you?"

"No."

"It is very important. It is not that I don't wish you to look at me while you talk, but there are other reasons. Now, it is the ninth of August, you say. Can you remember the number of the year?"

"Of course."

"What is it?"

"Nineteen hundred."

"Are you quite sure about that, Mr. Parsons?"

"Perfectly. My daughter will insist that this year is the beginning of the new century, while I assure her that it does not begin until 1901."

"I see. And for that reason you are quite certain about the date?"

"Yes. The date is August 9, 1900. I am absolutely positive about that."

"We will admit, then, that you are correct," replied the detective, although to himself he added: "Seven years of forgetfulness. Seven years of total blank. That poor daughter of his must think him dead by this time, as do all his friends. I wonder if any one of them will know him now, when they see him? It is doubtful—very doubtful."

Aloud he said:

"Let us return, now, to your call upon James Pollock, Mr. Parsons."

"Very well, sir."

"You stated, did you not, that Pollock is a friend of yours?"

"Yes."

"A long-time friend?"

"Hardly that. A friend—an acquaintance, rather—of only two years or so."

"He is perhaps a younger man than you are?"

"Much younger, although too old, in my opinion, to be a suitor for my daughter. She thinks so, too."

"Is he a suitor for her hand?"

"Yes."

"Did your call upon him this morning have anything to do with his pretentions in that direction?"

"Yes."

"Are you willing to tell me about it?"

"It strikes me, sir, that it is rather a personal matter, and yet I don't see that there is any real harm in the question, or any reason why I should not answer it."

"Nor do I."

"My call upon him did have something to do with that—yes."

"Will you tell me what it was?"

"I called upon him, the first thing in the morning, to endeavor to convince him of the folly of it all. My daughter and I have talked it all over carefully, and it is our united opinion. It is entirely with her consent, nay at her request, that I went there this morning and told James Pollock that——"

"Well?"

"I told him that his attentions to Alice must cease. I told him that he would always be a welcome guest at the house; that we should be glad to receive him at any time and at all times, on condition that he made it plain at once that he would cease his attentions to her—such attentions as might be construed in the light of a suitor."

"I understand. Will you tell me what he said to this?"

"He took it very well indeed; much better than I expected."

"Did he offer no objections?"

"He was disappointed, of course. He said so; but he was very courteous about it. I really decided that he is a much better fellow than I thought."

"He made no threats?"

"No. Certainly not. Why should he do such a thing as that, or even think of it?"

"Never mind that. I fancy that I know something about that same James Pollock, although there is always the chance that I may be mistaken, and that the man I know is not the one to whom you are referring."

"Very likely."

"Did you change the subject presently?"

"Almost at once."

"How long were you with him? I mean, how long were you in his company?"

"Why, quite a long time. He had many interesting things to tell me, and really seemed to desire that I should remain with him; and because I had carried such a disappointment to him, I thought it my duty not to hurry away. I think it was considerably after noon when we finally came out of his office."

"And where did you go then?"

"To luncheon."

"Together?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go?"

"To the Savarin, in the Equitable Building."

"And were you a considerable time there?"

"Yes. It was past three when we came out of the restaurant."

"You and Pollock alone?"

"No. We had encountered two friends of his, there in the restaurant. They joined us at table, and they came out of the building with us."

"Do you recall their names?"

"I do not. I was only introduced to them, you know, and I seldom catch names on such introductions as that. I do remember, however, that they were both very pleasant gentlemen. I rather liked them."

"Where did you go when you left the restaurant?"

"I think—yes, I am sure that we all entered a carriage together."

"A public hack, was it?"

"No. It was the private carriage that belonged to one of the gentlemen we met. I remember now that while we were at table he told us that his carriage was waiting

outside, and he invited us all to ride up-town with him; so we entered it together."

"Where did you leave the carriage?"

"Eh? What's that?"

"Where were you when you left the carriage? Did they take you home? Did your acquaintances leave you at your own door?"

"No."

"Where were you when you got down from the carriage?"

"Why—I—I must have been—— It is very strange, sir, but I do not seem to remember that at all."

"You don't recall leaving the carriage at all?"

"No."

"Was there a collision? Did you run into anything, or do you recall that anything in particular happened while you were a passenger in the carriage?"

"No. I remember entering it perfectly well. I remember riding as far up-town as the City Hall, for I recall when we passed it, but I don't seem to remember anything at all about that ride after that point."

"Suppose I should tell you now, Mr. Parsons, that this is another day than that one—eh? Would you be surprised?"

"I would be thunderstruck, sir."

"And yet it is so. This is another day. This is not the day upon which you rode in the carriage with Pollock and his friends."

"Was there an accident? Was I injured? Is that the reason why you are questioning me?"

"It is partly the reason."

"It is strange that I have no recollection of it, and yet I have not the slightest; nor do I feel any pain, as if I had been hurt. I can move my fingers; I can——"

"Never mind that now. We will come to all that later."

"Very well, sir. I am in your charge. There is only one thing that I would like to say, if you will permit me to speak."

"Certainly. What is it?"

"My daughter, sir. She should know at once. If, as you say, this is another day, she should be informed about me instantly, for I have never left her for long at a time, since the death of her mother. I have never been away from her over night before since that time."

"I think she has been informed about it before now, Mr. Parsons."

"Thank you. It is a relief to know that. We are inseparable, my daughter and I. If word of my condition, and the fact that I was comparatively uninjured, did not get to her last night, before the hour for retiring, I tremble to think how frightened she must have been. But as it is, sir, I will try to be content, although I do wish that you would contrive to get me to my home with as little delay as possible."

"That shall be done, I assure you, Mr. Parsons."

"Thank you, sir, thank you."

"And now, there are a few more questions you should answer."

CHAPTER IV.

UNFOLDING THE MYSTERIES OF A PLOT.

That the detective was amazed by the consequences of his experiment must be understood. He had not dared to hope for such results when he began the whistling of tunes and ended by the shouting of given names from an adjoining room.

The name Henry had almost escaped him in his effort to think of all the names he could, to test the old man with. It had come to him only at the last moment, and then as an afterthought, although it is a common enough name.

But when he saw that the enunciation of it affected the old gentleman, and realized that there was still something wanting to perfect the effect, the natural combination of the two names of Henry and Clay occurred to him.

He thought instantly that Cranky had been born at about the time when many fathers delighted in naming their sons after the famous statesman, and so, without giving himself a second thought, he had shouted out the name of Henry Clay.

The result of that happy thought we have already seen, and Nick did not doubt that instead of living his early life under an abbreviation of his name, Parsons had always been addressed by his two given names. This would account for the effect that the utterance of them had upon him.

The mere name Henry one may hear uttered often enough. Many men bear it, and it is sufficiently common so that it might not have attracted its owner's attention particularly without the combination that the detective made with the other one.

But the memories thus invoked—how was that to be accounted for? Not by the mere utterance of the names surely, although that was the finishing touch of it.

But the fainting spell that the old man had had following upon the recollections induced by the singing of "Old Kentucky Home" was doubtless the real thing. He had come out of the faint to hear his own name called only a moment later, and the two circumstances combined had done the work.

The story, as related by the old gentleman, who thought that seven years had been but a day, was altogether remarkable also.

The mention of the name of Pollock, and the fact that James Pollock was the name of the very man whom Nick had arrested as being the head chief of the criminal trust, were significant. Pollock's supposed passion was for the

daughter of Parsons, who had doubtless been a very rich man, since he could afford a home up the Hudson and also keep up an establishment near Riverside Drive, in the city of New York.

Nick Carter believed that he began to see light through the darkness that had clouded the seven years of the old man's forgetfulness.

If the Pollock upon whom the old gentleman had called the day he disappeared, and the Pollock whom Nick had arrested, and who was now in prison awaiting trial, were one and the same, the working out of the two cases would be like the following up and disposing of one.

Also, the old man had supplied a motive for the strange and as yet unknown accident that had deprived him of his memory; that is, the detective could very plainly see a motive, if the Pollock of one case was the same man as the Pollock of the other case.

He paused a moment to think it all over before continuing his questions.

There had been, for instance, the rich Henry Clay Parsons, who had a young and doubtless a beautiful—daughter. Youth is always beautiful if we stop to consider all that it means.

The daughter would naturally inherit, sooner or later, as Fate should determine, her father's riches, and her husband would have the enjoyment of them. What more natural than that such a man as Pollock should seek to win them both for his own?

Again, what more natural, provided that that other Pollock was the scoundrel Nick believed him to be, that upon receiving the old man at his office and being told that there was no hope for him; that both daughter and father repudiated him as a prospective member of the family—what more natural than that he should set at once about winning his own way in the face of all obstacles?

No doubt, if that James Pollock were *the* Pollock, he had foreseen the refusal; he had foreseen that the old gentleman in his kindly way would tell him, when he called that morning, that he could not wed with his daughter—and foreseeing it, he had prepared for it.

How? By having ready for instant action his assistants in the crime he intended to commit, if a crime should become necessary in order to carry out his schemes.

Mr. Parsons told Nick that Pollock seemed reluctant to have him leave the office, and, because he had taken the man such unwelcome news, he had pity on him and did remain; and in this circumstance Nick believed that he could discern further confirmation of his suspicions.

For Pollock had doubtless had those other two men awaiting him, where he could telephone to them, or in some manner make them aware of the fact that his best laid plans had miscarried.

In that case, then would come the invitation to luncheon at the Savarin; Pollock, accompanied by Parsons, would encounter the two other men as if they had met by accident; they would be—as they were—invited to sit at table with them, and during the meal that followed, it would be a part with the general plan that one of them should mention that his carriage would conveniently carry four; that it was at the door, and that he would be most happy if the others would ride uptown with him.

Then the ride in the carriage; after that, a drugged cigar, or something of the sort, would put the old man entirely in their power, and permit Pollock to do with him as he pleased.

But what had been done with him then that would make him for seven long years forget utterly who he was?

No doubt Pollock had intended to get rid of him entirely, and had so planned; but there was the likelihood that he had left the actual murder to another, who had not done the job with thoroughness.

In some way the old man had escaped with his life, but with an utter loss of memory that had accomplished the same purpose for a time, as if he were actually dead—and perhaps Pollock had never been told that his orders had not been carried out literally.

There was only one argument that might be raised against this theory, and that was the fact that if the two Pollocks were the same, and if the plans had been about as Nick outlined them in his thought, how did it happen that the chief of the criminal trust had not recognized his victim in Cranky of Mulvaney's Cover, who waited upon him whenever he went there?

Still, there might be adequate answers to this objection to the theory.

Several years must have passed between the times when Pollock got rid of the old man and the time when he saw him again, at Mulvaney's. Nick's information was to the effect that Mulvaney had had that particular place only four years, and he knew that the criminal trust had not made use of it, as an organization, until within the last year or two; so there had been at least three and possibly four or five years or even more after the supposed death of Parsons, when Pollock had not seen him at all.

Was it likely that after all that time, with the changes that must have been wrought in Parson's appearance by time and circumstance—was it likely that Pollock would recognize the man he had ordered murdered?

It was not. There could be no direct connection in his mind, between the millionaire of Riverside Drive and the decrepit old man of Mulvaney's Cover, who had lost his reason.

And even if he had recognized him, he must only have shrugged his shoulders and told himself that no danger could come from him now.

Seven years had passed; Henry Clay Parsons had long

been supposed to be dead; his estate had doubtless been administered; perhaps even now his daughter was the wife of Pollock, and even if Parsons should suddenly remember who he was nobody would believe him; nobody would listen to such a story from an old lunatic who had been known for years around one locality of the city.

And, again, if anybody should feel inclined to listen to him, it would be time enough to put him out of the way when the danger appeared. And what better place could there be to keep him in seclusion than there, at Mulvaney's Cover?

Nick turned these ideas all over in his mind while he was preparing the next questions he wanted to ask the old gentleman; and it did not require a tenth of the time it has taken the reader to go over them.

"Will you make another effort to recall the names of the two men who were with you in the carriage?" he asked of Parsons.

"I cannot remember them. I don't think I heard them at all, or, if I did, I paid no attention."

"Do you think you might recall them if I should mention them?"

"Possibly, although I hardly think so."

"I have already told you that I also have known a man by the name of Pollock, although I am not sure that his first name is James. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"I might mention the names of a few men whom I know to be friends of his."

"Yes."

"How about the name of Hogarth?"

"Hogarth? Hogarth? I do not recall that it is one of them."

"Curly. How is that?"

"Curly? No, that was not one of the names, but it suggests one of the men to me; and now that you have come so near to it, I think the name was Curry. Yes, I am sure that it was Curry."

"Describe that man to me, if you can."

"I remember that he was very dark—they both were that, as a matter of fact—and that he had very curly hair. I remember that."

"Can you remember if there was a scar over his right eye?"

"Yes, I do recall that, because it was referred to. I think I mentioned it, because of something that was said, and he told me that it was caused by a fall from a horse."

"Good, Mr. Parsons. That man was named Curly, not Curry. I know him, or think I do. And now for the other one. You are sure that Hogarth is not the name?"

"Yes; very sure."

"Was it Morgan?"

"*Morgan!* That was the name. I remember now."

Nick Carter smiled, well pleased.

Morgan—Black Morgan, to be more correct—was another crook who frequented Mulvaney's. He was the one with whom the detective had fought a four-round fight with gloves. He continued:

"Keep your mind upon Morgan for a moment. Do you remember that he was a very large man—built almost like a giant?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I have spotted both men for you, Mr. Parsons. And not only that, but what you have told me settles the point that the two Pollocks—the one I know and the one who introduced you to those men—are the same."

"But why are you particular about it? What has all that to do with my present condition?"

"It means, sir, that you were foully dealt with. It means that there was no accident, but that you were first drugged, while you were in the carriage, and then set upon by the two hirelings of James Pollock, who were instructed to put you out of the way in order that the field might be left clear for Pollock to win your daughter for his wife. It means——"

Too late the detective saw that he had made a mistake in telling the old man so much.

Now he gave a cry of fright and started to his feet, opening his eyes.

He stood there, trembling for a moment, and then as suddenly as a light goes out the look of intelligence faded from his eyes, the vacant look returned to them, and he sank back again upon the chair, as much a derelict as he had been before the flame of memory started into life.

CHAPTER V.

THE UNVEILING OF HIDDEN SECRETS.

To all outward appearances the man was Cranky again—the same poor derelict of humanity he had been before Nick Carter encountered him in that dive on the East Side of the city, where he had for years been acting in a servile capacity, running errands and caring for the comforts of the criminals who resorted there.

The detective had feared this moment. He had known that the flame of memory so suddenly and so strangely revived could not endure for long, and that it behooved him to obtain all the information that was possible while it lasted.

He was thankful now that he had taken advantage of the opportunity thus afforded him; he was delighted to think that he had gained so much valuable information.

For he now knew who the derelict was; knew his name and approximately where he had lived at that time, seven years ago, when he had disappeared from all the world that knew him.

And the daughter? What of her?

Had James Pollock profited by his crime against the

father, and had he succeeded in marrying the daughter, and thus getting his grip upon the millions she would control after her father's death?

That question could not be answered at once, but the way was open and clear for the detective to get the whole story without much delay.

His two assistants, Chick and Patsy, had entered the house while he was engaged with the old man, the one coming from Philadelphia, and the other from Boston; and now he felt that he must listen to their reports.

When the commissioner of police of New York City first applied to the detective to assist him in running to earth the criminal trust, Nick had sent them to those two cities; and he had done so because the chiefs of police of those cities had written to him to the effect that the same conditions obtained there as in New York.

The whole effort of the detective had been to ascertain where the real headquarters of the gang was located; and he had found that out himself by his discoveries at Mulvaney's Cover; but nevertheless it was possible that the two assistants had obtained some information from the other cities which would be of value, and Nick wished to make the most of all that came to his hands.

He turned to Cranky now, addressing him by the only name the man knew when he was in that condition of semi-intelligence.

"Cranky," he said, "have you any recollection of what has passed between us, during the last hour?"

"No, sir; not much. I remember that you have been asking me some questions about strange men; but it was all dreams, dreams, dreams."

"All right. We will let it go at that. You still believe in me, do you not?"

"Certainly I do."

"You still believe that I will succeed in finding out who you are and in restoring you to those who love you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And will you do exactly as I tell you to do?"

"I will."

"Very well. I am going to take you to a room, here in my house. It shall be your room until we find your own home. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will instruct my man, Joseph, to procure some good [illegible] for you, and [illegible] provided with everything you need or want; but I want you to promise me that you will remain inside this house, and not go out of it, even so far as the front steps, without my permission."

"I will promise that, Mr. Carter."

"It will be necessary for me to be absent for a while. I don't know exactly how long, but you can content yourself with the thought that while I am absent, I am exerting myself all the while in your matters, and in the search for your home and your daughter. Will you be content?"

"I will."

"That is as it should be. Come with me, now."

The detective led the old man to a large and airy room on the top floor of his house, and established him there; but, as he was turning away, he thought it would do no harm to try him again, and he asked:

"Cranky, did you ever know a man named Parsons?"

"Parsons? Parsons? The name is familiar to me, but I do not remember," was the reply.

The detective turned away then and descended the stairs to his own study, where he found the two assistants awaiting him.

"Well, my lads," he said, "what did you discover? You first, Chick. Tell me what you found in Philadelphia?"

"I found conditions there much the same as they are here," replied Chick. "The city is overrun with criminals of the worst sort, who are working, without the shadow of a doubt, under the guidance of an established organization. Crimes are committed with impunity, and with a degree of daring that is appalling. The police have been as helpless against them as they are in New York, and are at their wits' end to know what to do."

"I understood all that before. Tell me what you accomplished."

"I found the meeting-place of their local organization, and managed to get myself inside of it. They have a large room there, with an altar—I think you might call it an altar, for want of a better term to apply to it—with an altar at one end of it. I found a way to enter that room during the daytime of the day preceding their meeting; I concealed myself under the platform of the altar and waited there six long hours before the members began to appear."

"Well?"

"When they entered I, of course, heard all the proceedings. It was about the most interesting [illegible] that I ever attended."

"I have no doubt of it."

"I need not weary you with the details?"

"No; just give me the facts."

"First, they had the reports of committees. During that ceremony I heard that a man named Hogarth, who is the local chief here in New York, had been arrested, and it was thought that Nick Carter had somehow found him and arrested him, although it was not believed that you were wise as to his connection with the organization."

"I see. Go on."

"A man was named as a committee of one to go to New York and confer with the head chief upon matters generally. Then they considered the cases of two men who were in jail, arrested for local crimes. Committees were appointed to see what could be done toward getting them set free, through influence or bribery, or by any means that offered; and, in the event of failure to accomplish that, to supply legal talent for their defense."

"Exactly. I understand that, too."

"After that, there came the reports of men who had ideas to suggest for the robbery of certain places. These were considered with all the gravity and earnestness that a board of directors of a railroad or a bank would give to an idea advanced by one of them."

"Naturally."

"I learned of three places that were to be robbed, and when and how the robberies were to be committed; so you may be sure that all those who were engaged in the affairs were gathered in."

"What more?"

"That is about all, save that I accomplished what I went there to do, which was to find out to a certainty in what city the head offices of the organization were located. I found it to be New York."

"I know."

"And that a man named Pollock—James Pollock is the full name—is the head chief of the full band of criminals."

"Good. Is that all?"

"Yes. That is all. I did not learn where the place of meeting is located, here in New York, save that it is at a dive of some sort called the 'Cover,' and that it is run by a man named Mulvaney."

"Fine, Chick. And then——?"

"Then I came home."

"Now, Patsy, what have you got to tell me?"

"My report is about the same as Chick's, with a few variations. I didn't exactly get inside their meeting-place, but I did almost as well."

"How?"

"I went in for being a crook myself, you know."

"Yes. Well?"

"I know a place down on the water-front where I had occasion to go once, and where the thieves and burglars of the city are in the habit of congregating. I went there, and hung around for several days—that is, nights; it is the same thing."

"Yes."

"At first some of the men there looked upon me with suspicion, but when I actually accomplished a good thing, and they came to know about it, they got interested. At last I picked out one of them who seemed to be a likely subject for my plans, and I put it up to him to help me out on a bit of burglary that I had fixed up with the police."

"Tell me about that."

"I took one of the detectives of the regular force into my confidence; told him all that was necessary in order to carry out my plans, and had it all arranged that on a certain night I was to burglarize a particular house in Commonwealth Avenue that happened to be closed at the time, the family being in Europe."

"Well?"

"The result was that we were both captured while we were at work in the house—and we both escaped before they got us to the station-house."

"Through your own individual efforts—eh?"

"Yes. It appeared so. My pal thought that I was the greatest thing that ever happened. He saw me, with his own eyes, knock down and out three policemen, and then grab him and tell him to make a run for it with me. We got safely away, because it was all fixed up with the cops; but of course he didn't know that."

"Certainly not."

"Well, he thought I was just the greatest ever. He said so. He told me that I was too valuable a man to be running around loose, and that I ought to come into the organization.

"I asked him what organization, and after a little questioning he told me the whole story. You see, I had won his confidence and his admiration so thoroughly that he thought it was all right to let me into all his secrets, particularly as I promised to join at once."

"It's a pity that you didn't join."

"I mean to do so. With your permission I shall return to Boston to-night and be ready for the initiation to-morrow night."

"Perhaps it won't be necessary. Maybe the information you have now, given to you by that pal you saved from arrest, will suffice, with what I have already."

"Possibly. That is for you to judge, chief."

"You had best tell me all about it."

"All right. It is quite a lot, when you come to consider it."

"Then let me have the story."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE THIRD DEGREE.

"The name of the man to whom I have referred as 'pal' was Morgan," continued Patsy. "He was called 'Red' Morgan, to distinguish him from an older brother, who is as black as this one is red. The brother is somewhere here in New York now, and is one of the oldest members of the organization."

"I have some knowledge of Black Morgan," said Nick. "So your pal was his brother, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, go on."

"Red was very much predisposed in my favor, especially after I saved him from the cops. After that there was nothing that he would not do for me; nothing that he would not tell me; and to hear him give up his secrets was like taking candy from a child."

"What did he tell you?"

"When he started in to tell me about the organization, I headed him off, and asked him to relate just what had happened to him when he joined it, if he wanted me to get a correct idea of the thing."

"That was good. And he told you?"

"He sure did. Told me everything. He said that he was first approached by one of his big brother's old pals, who thought he would be a good subject for initiation; and when he finally consented to join, he was taken to the meeting-place at one o'clock in the night, and told to wait in a small room until somebody came after him.

"He waited there a little while, when suddenly the lights went out, and he found himself in total darkness. He had just begun to think that the whole affair was some joke they were trying to play on him, when he was seized from behind and bound and gagged before he could offer any resistance.

"He was also blindfolded, and in that shape he was carried into a room, where he could feel that a lot of men were gathered around him. He was laid down upon a rug on the floor, and then he was asked to take an oath, which he repeated to me. It was horrible."

"I have no doubt of it. I have heard such oaths before."

"Well, he repeated the whole thing. It bound him, under the most awful penalties you can imagine, to keep the secrets of the organization forever——"

"And yet he was at that very moment revealing them to you."

"He mentioned that fact, but said that he considered me as good as a member already, and swore that if I ever told what he had done, he would kill me with his own hands, if it was the last act he ever committed."

"Go on."

"When he had taken the oath——"

"Stop a moment. Tell me some of the things that the oath demanded of him."

"It demanded, first, abject obedience to the local heads of the order, and absolute subservience to the will of the head chief. Under that obligation, if one should live up to it, a mere command for the local head is sufficient to incite to murder, or arson, or to the commission of any crime whatsoever."

"Well?"

"And the penalties are awful. There are committees which look after that part of it. There is a vengeance committee, whose duty it is, while it lasts, to murder in cold blood any member of the organization who has broken one of the rules."

"Red was preparing you for all of that, was he?"

"Yes."

"Did he tell you how many degrees there are of the order?"

"Yes. Three."

"Do you know anything about them?"

"Only about the first one. Red had not gone further than that."

"What is the difference in the degrees? Did he tell you that?"

"The first degree contains just the rank and file of all sorts of thieves, pickpockets, and so on. No man can get from the first degree into the second, until he has done something to recommend him especially. No matter what he may have done before he joined, that doesn't count in his favor at all. It is only what he succeeds in doing after he has joined the first degree."

"I understand."

"Let me explain further."

"Very well."

"For example, Red was anxious to get into the second degree. He had applied for admission to it, and had been told that he was a likely enough candidate, but that he could not be taken into it until he had done something especially fine."

"As what, for instance?"

"He was to commit a burglary or a robbery, or work the confidence game or the wire-tappers', or, in fact, anything that would be successful; but he must, in order to become eligible for the second degree, pull off not less than five thousand dollars, and that five thousand would have to be turned over to the order."

"As a sort of initiation fee?"

"Something like that; but mainly it was his expertness that was in question."

"Yes?"

"He had to commit that robbery, or whatever it was, so expertly that there would not be the least suspicion in the minds of the police that it was he who did it. He must get clean away with the goods. That was the test."

"I understand."

"And he thought, when I proposed the house on Commonwealth Avenue, that he had hit it. But for the fact that we were interrupted by the police, he thought it would have been the act. And now he is more anxious than ever to have me join and be pals with him."

"Possibly I may send you back there. I will think about it."

"Red swore that he would come here after me if I did not return, and he told me that if I found a better graft over here, he would follow me, and that I could join here as well as in Boston."

"That sounds better. I think you had better send word for him to come here."

"I was thinking the same thing myself."

"Do you know anything about the men who constitute the so-called second degree?"

"Only that they are men who have accomplished what I have described to you."

"Do you know how many members the first degree has?"

"No. It must contain thousands, though. They are in every city in the country, Red tells me, and the order is constantly growing."

"Without doubt. Do you know how many members the second degree contains?"

"No; only that they are much fewer than the first. There are three lodges of the first in Boston, and there is only one of the second."

"And the third?"

"The third degree exists only in New York, at the present time. There are members of it in all the cities. The third degree meets once a month only, and sometimes not as often as that. Red couldn't tell me much about it."

"Did he know how many members it contains?"

"He had been told that there were only twenty-seven."

"Correct," said the detective. "That was only a test question, Patsy."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that I have already learned that there are twenty-seven members to the highest degree of the order. I know where it meets, and I have attended one of their gatherings, although it was an informal one; not a regular meeting."*

"Then you know more than I do about it."

"No; I don't think so. The meeting that I attended was in session only a few moments. I heard enough only to know that it was a meeting of the highest degree of the order, and then it was dismissed. But a little later that same night I captured, and I now have in prison awaiting such use as I shall have for him, the chief of the whole bunch."

"You don't say so. Then what more do you want?"

"I want to get all those third degree chiefs. You see, they must be the chiefs of the local degrees; possibly they are what we might call seconds."

"That's it."

"Oh, you know still more about it, do you?"

"A little."

"Tell me all you do know."

"There is supposed to be only one member of the third degree from each city where there is a second degree. For example, it is Red's ambition to get into the second degree in Boston, and ultimately to be elected chief of it. That will make him eligible for the third degree. If he is accepted, he becomes forthwith a member of the third degree, and must appear in New York once a month, to attend the meetings."

"Is that the only way he can get into the third?"

"No. There is another."

"What is that?"

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 569.

"He mentioned the city of Milwaukee."

"What about it."

"There is no degree there at all. The Order of the Python—by the way, that is its name, Nick."

"I knew that."

"Well, the Order of the Python has no lodge in Milwaukee. Red suggested that we should go there and organize one."

"Why?"

"By doing that, we could organize also a second degree, and he could be elected its chief. That, you see, would get him into the third."

"Oh, yes, I understand now. That would also increase the number of the third degree to twenty-eight."

"Precisely."

"I understand the thing now. Only the heads of the second degrees in the different cities can meet with the third degree. They are merely delegates to the central meeting."

"Yes."

"And they probably elect the chief of the whole thing from among their number."

"That is the idea. Red had somehow picked up all that information, and he aspires to become, some day, the head of the entire order."

"It strikes me that he is a poor subject for that sort of thing if he gives up his secrets as easily as he did in talking to you."

"That was what I thought about it, although I didn't tell him so."

"Naturally not."

"I told him that I was coming over here to see a particular friend, and that if I decided to remain, I would send him word. Do you think I had better do that?"

"Yes. He might be a valuable man to have around, particularly since he is a brother to Black Morgan. I have some other business than this order would give me, with Black Morgan. I want to nail him for a bit of work outside of their regular business—some work in which he was interested before the order was organized. I think, Patsy, that you had better send word to Red at once, to come over here. Say that you want him. And then, when he arrives, we will take him with us to Mulvaney's and see what happens."

"All right. I'll attend to it at once."

"I haven't been to Mulvaney's since I took Pollock out of there, and I am curious to find out what has happened there since."

CHAPTER VII.

NICK CARTER'S CAREFUL PLANS.

Nick Carter did not give full expression to his desire to visit Mulvaney's, when he referred to the subject to Patsy; but now he told him all about how he had gone there in the disguise that he had named Ruddy Mike; how he had fought a battle with the gloves with Black Morgan, and had ended by knocking him out; and how finally he had, with the aid of Cranky, taken Pollock, the chief, from his bed and conveyed him to prison.*

The detective had not been near Mulvaney's Cover since that morning, and he often wondered what sort of consternation must have reigned there when it was found that Pollock had disappeared in the night.

Nick had taken pains to destroy all traces of what had happened, and, with the assistance of Cranky, had left the room in which Pollock had been staying in precisely the same condition it had been in before he occupied it.

Mulvaney, when he found that Pollock had gone, and that his room was left in perfect order, may have come to the conclusion that he had simply gone away without retiring, and had thought it best to do so without disturbing anybody; but there remained the unexplained disappearance of Ruddy Mike.

Nick, as Ruddy Mike, had lived in the place two days. He had made himself a good fellow among them there, and had gotten himself rather liked; especially had he been more or less a favorite of the proprietor, who rarely showed favor to anybody. But Nick had won his heart by knocking out Black Morgan as he had done, and from that moment Mulvaney had made a pet of him.

It was a question in the mind of the detective now as to whether or not it would be wise for him to appear there again in the same character.

There were numerous arguments in favor of such a course, and as many more against it.

The disappearance of Ruddy Mike at that particular time might have aroused suspicion; but, again, since nothing could be known there regarding the real cause for the disappearance of Pollock, Nick did not see exactly how suspicion could attach to Ruddy Mike.

There was only the strange thing that the two disappearances had taken place at the same time, and Nick believed that he could get over that.

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 569.

He thought of an exceedingly daring method of doing so, if only he could hope to carry it out successfully.

The story told him by Patsy suggested it, and the idea was that if he could only make Mulvaney believe that he—Ruddy Mike—was in Pollock's confidence, all would go well. If he could make it appear that he had gone away from the place with Pollock, acting under his orders, all would be well, for then Mulvaney would suppose at once that Ruddy was high up in the order.

But to accomplish this successfully, Nick realized that no others of the third degree men should happen in at the place. They would be in a position to betray him at once, if Mulvaney should take one of them into his confidence.

But it was not likely that any member of the third degree would happen in there. They were scattered throughout the country, and were only supposed to visit New York when they were sent for, or when there was a regular meeting of their degree. Pollock was where he could not have sent for any of them, and therefore it was not likely that one would arrive during the short time Nick would be at the place.

The more he thought it over, the more satisfied he became that he could carry out a bold bit of deception with Mulvaney, and at last he decided to try it.

He turned again to Patsy.

"Did Red Morgan suggest that you should visit Mulvaney's while you were in New York?" he asked.

"He sure did," was the reply.

"Did he give you any method of making yourself known in case you did go there?"

"Only in case I happened to meet his brother, the black one."

"Did he in that case?"

"Yes."

"What did he tell you to do?"

"He told me to tell Black Morgan who I was, and he gave me a message to deliver to him which he said would satisfy his brother that I was all right."

"Have you got the message?"

"It is a verbal one."

"Can you make up again in the disguise you wore in Boston?"

"Sure."

"Is it one that won't rub off, or cannot be disarranged?"

"You bet."

"Then I think we will go there together to-night, Patsy."

"What time?"

"Along about midnight."

"I'll be ready."

"I will be known as Ruddy Mike, down there. I must be an old pal of yours whom you have not seen for a long time. I have been in prison. I just got out of Sing Sing by making my escape—that is the story I told to them down there, and which they believed, for the reason that it was literally true. I did go to Auburn, had myself transferred from there to Mattewan, and from there to Sing Sing, from which I made my escape. It was all in the papers. Didn't you see it?"

"Yes; but I never suspected that it was about you."

"Probably not. Neither did the men at the Cover."

"What more?"

"That will be enough. They know me for a fighter, down there. I had a mill with this same Black Morgan, and knocked him out, too."

"Good."

"Then I disappeared; and right there, Patsy, comes the delicate part of what we have to do to-night."

"How so?"

"I just told you that I managed to get in at a meeting of the third degree of the criminal trust, or, as they call themselves, the Order of the Python."

"Yes."

"When that meeting was over, the chief, Pollock by name, went to his room to sleep until noon of the next day. As soon as he had gone to his room, I followed him, and, waiting till he was asleep, I let him breathe just enough chloroform to stupefy him, and then, with the aid of some men I had sent for, we carried him away, and he is now locked up in a place where he can't communicate with the outside."

"Well?"

"The point is that Ruddy Mike disappeared at the same time. I am going to represent that I went away with Pollock, by Pollock's orders—see?"

"Yes."

"If I can carry it through, it will make all the rest as easy as living on a farm; but if a third degree member of the Order of the Python should happen to blow in, things will be in the air, and almost anything may happen."

"You are going to take your chances on that?"

"Yes."

"Have you planned out what you will do after you get there?"

"Not much of it—no."

"If they do not drop to you, it will be easy sailing, you say."

"Comparatively—yes."

"And if they should take a drop, there is likely to be a fight."

"More than that, Patsy."

"More?"

"Yes. In that case it would be such a one-sided fight that there wouldn't be much chance that either of us would ever see the outside of the place again. Now, what I suggest is that you go down there ahead of me. Suppose you blow in at the regular saloon, about half-past ten or eleven, to-night."

"Yes."

"You can hang around the place, in the regular saloon, until Black Morgan comes in, if he does."

"Well?"

"I could tell you how to get into the back place after hours, but on the whole I think it will be better for all concerned if we don't work it that way. You had better appear to be entirely on the square when you go there."

"Tell me how to work it. Tell me how you would like to have me do it."

"Go to the regular saloon part of the establishment, so that you will arrive there between half-past ten and eleven. Stand near the lower end of the bar, and when the opportunity offers, speak confidentially to the bartender; or, better still, to Mulvaney himself, if he should happen to appear."

"But I don't know him."

"You can't miss him. He is as big as a mountain, with smooth face. He weighs over three hundred, and, notwithstanding that fact, is as quick on his feet as a cat."

"Well, if I speak to him or to the bartender, what shall I say?"

"Ask for Black Morgan. Say that you were told to ask there for him, either of the bartender or the proprietor. Say that you have a message for him from his brother in Boston."

"All right. I'm on."

"You will be suspected at first. They will tell you that they don't know any such man at all; or that he is not in the city; or that he has long since ceased to come there—and all that sort of talk. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Just grin, and tell them you know that would be a lay, but that all the same you know he is there, or at least will be there later, for Red Morgan told you so, and what Red says goes—see?"

"Yes."

"They will end by giving you an interview in some manner, with Black Morgan. And then it will be up to you."

"I can stand it."

"So much the better for you. But I'll tell you now that Black Morgan is a smart proposition. He's as slick as they make them; and he is likely to try to make you angry, too, so I want you to remember that temper of yours and keep it under control, for I don't want any fighting going on to-night if it can be helped."

"I'll be on my guard."

"If you can satisfy Morgan that you came from his brother, he will take you into the back room, after the other place closes."

"I see."

"Later, I will blow in there, if I am not already there when you get in. Now, pay attention, Patsy."

"Yes."

"As soon as you see me you must rush for me as if you were going to knock me out in one round. Say that I stole away your best girl, or something of that sort, and make all the row you can without words, and so that it can end by our shaking hands and becoming the good friends that we will make them believe we have been in the past. Can you do all that?"

"I sure can."

"Then leave the rest to me."

CHAPTER VIII.

PATSY'S INTERVIEW WITH BLACK MORGAN.

Nick Carter's disguise as Ruddy Mike was perfect. He reproduced the stain on the right side of his face so perfectly that those who had seen him on the occasion of his other visit to Mulvaney's Cover would not notice that there had been any change.

Patsy's make-up for the occasion was merely that of a young tough, which he knew so well how to imitate, for none could carry off a part like that better than Patsy.

He finished getting himself ready, and left the house to go to Mulvaney's, soon after nine o'clock, and for the

moment—until Nick Carter joined him at the place—it is better that we follow his movements, since so much depended upon the success of his part of the undertaking.

It was a few moments after half-past ten when he entered the main saloon of the place, and almost the first person he noticed, seated at the rear end of the room, was Mulvaney himself. Nick's description, although short, had been so perfect that Patsy had no difficulty in recognizing him at once.

His first move was to go straight to the bar and order himself a mixed drink, which he pretended to swallow; then he stood there for several minutes looking around him as if he were merely curious to inspect his surroundings.

Naturally he had been spotted at once as a stranger there; but quite as naturally those who did spot him recognized in his appearance one of their own kind. They left him entirely alone, waiting for him to take the initiative, if he chose to do so.

Presently, when the bartender passed near him, Patsy said:

"Is Mr. Mulvaney about here anywhere, if you please?"

"That's him over there, in the big chair," was the reply, and the bartender nodded toward the boss.

"Do you happen to know if he's good-natured this evening?" asked Patsy, with a wink.

"He is always that unless you cross him—or try to work a touch. He's as hard as nails, then."

"Oh, I've got no touch up my sleeve."

"What is your business with him?" asked the bartender.

"If I told you that, it wouldn't be with him, but with you," replied the young detective; and he moved away from the bar and crossed the length of the room to where Mulvaney was seated.

"Good evening to you, Mr. Mulvaney," said Patsy, in an easy tone, as he drew near.

"Good evening," was the reply. "Who may you be, for I take it that you are a stranger here, ain't you?"

"I am that. I'm from Boston, and the man who sent me here with a message told me to ask you for the man I was to deliver it to."

"So you've got a message, have you?" asked Mulvaney.

"Yes."

"For me?"

"No, sir. It is for a man named Morgan. Black Morgan, you call him here."

"Black Morgan?" repeated Mulvaney, with a smile. "I have never happened to hear of him. Who is he?"

"He's a man that comes in here frequently, and his brother told me that you would know where I could find him or send word to him, so that he would come here to get the message."

"Oh, his brother did that, did he? Who might his brother be, youngster?"

"His brother is Red Morgan, for the same reason that the other one is Black Morgan, for he is about as red as he says the other one is black."

"Well, that isn't a bad description. What do you want with him? It might be that I could find him for you if I should try very hard."

"Red said you could do that."

"What do you want with him?"

"I want to deliver his brother's message."

"Couldn't you deliver the message to me and let me pass it on for you?"

"Not very well, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because his brother wanted me to give it to him in person, that's all. It isn't anything of any great importance that I know of, only that he wanted me to give it to his brother."

"Tell me something about yourself, and possibly I can put you in a way to see Black Morgan, before the night is over."

"What do you want to know about me?"

"Who are you?"

"I'm called Slick, by those who know me best; but I guess that don't tell you anything."

"Not much, for a fact. What's your lay?"

"Most anything that I can turn my hand to," said Patsy, adopting a lower tone and taking a step nearer to Mulvaney. "I am not particular what the graft is as long as it pays. But it strikes me, mister, that that's neither here nor there, is it? I didn't come here to give you my family history unless you've got some reason for wanting to know it, in which case I will be happy to oblige you."

Mulvaney laughed.

"It isn't your history I'm wanting, my friend," he said. "It is to know whether you are on the level. Are you afraid of snakes?"

"That depends upon what color they happen to be," replied the young detective, with a broad grin.

"I see," said Mulvaney, satisfied that Patsy was not a

member of the Order of the Python, because he had not given the correct answer to the question.

"I know what you're up to," said Patsy, quick to comprehend. "I have been asked that question before. You refer to an organization that some of the guns belong to. Well, mister, I ain't joined it yet, but I'm going to do it. Red Morgan is going to propose me, when he gets ready to do the act."

"Are you sure of that? Did he say so?"

"Sure he did."

"Then I guess you are all right."

"You bet your sweet life I am all right, mister."

"Well, if you'll hang around the barroom until closing time, at one o'clock, I shouldn't wonder if Black would blow in just before that time. If he doesn't, I will see that you get a chance to speak to him."

"Thank you, Mulvaney."

"How are things in Boston, Slick?"

"Pretty much on the bum, just now. There ain't much doing in our line. The coppers are getting altogether too sly for us, and unless you are under cover all the time, you get pinched. That is why I thought I'd like to join the organization. That is why I spoke to Red about it, and asked him if he thought he could get me into it."

"I see. That was a wise move on your part."

"So I thought."

Patsy went over to the bar again and stood there for a long time, dawdling over a drink that he had ordered, and which he did not even pretend to swallow.

He was thus engaged, when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and a gruff voice said, almost in his ear:

"You don't seem to be enjoying that drink, stranger."

"No," said Patsy; "not much. Who are you, since you seem to know me?"

"I'm the man you said you were looking for," was the reply.

"Oh, are you? And who may that be? I am not aware that I was looking for anybody at just that moment."

"The boss told me that you were looking for me."

"Well, I won't pretend to argue with the boss; but I'm not looking for you. You can put that in your pipe and smoke it, if it's hot enough."

"You're sassy, aren't you? Aren't you looking for somebody?"

"Maybe I am, and, again, maybe I am not. Who are you, anyhow?"

"My name is Morgan."

"Oh, it is, eh? Glad to hear it."

"Aren't you looking for Morgan?"

"No, I'm not. I don't happen to know any such person."

"How about Black Morgan?"

"That might be different. Is that what you call yourself? Black Morgan?"

"It is what the guns around here call me."

"Are there any other Morgans about anywhere?"

"I'm the only one who happens to be here. There is another one in Boston, only he happens to be of another color."

"Exactly. I guess you're on; but, all the same, if you don't mind, we'll just prove it. Mulvaney is over there in his corner. Come over with me and let him introduce us, will you?"

"Sure thing. That's what I'm here for. He sent in for me, that's how I happened to come out to see who it was that wanted me."

"All right. I ain't go no message for you until after old Mulvaney has said that you are the man I'm looking for. After that, it will be all plain sailing."

And so they crossed together to Mulvaney, who was watching them with a smiling countenance, and as they drew near to him he asked:

"Have you two got together yet?"

"Not quite," replied Patsy. "We want to be introduced first."

"Oh, I see. Well, Slick, this man is Black Morgan. At least, he is the only person around here who answers to that name, so if you have got any message, as you said you had, it is up to you now to deliver it."

"Thank you, Mulvaney," said Patsy; then he caught Morgan by the sleeve and drew him to one side. "I just wanted to be cock-sure," he said; "and now I will make myself twice sure. Have you got a brother in Boston who is called Red Morgan?"

"I have."

"Then I'll describe Red to you, so that you'll be sure about me, and after that I'll deliver the message he gave me."

"Fire away."

"Red is about my height, only a good deal heavier. He is a fighter from way back and told me to tell you confidentially that he'd bet you a horse with the hide, hoofs and teeth thrown in that he could lick you now, although you gave him a terrible beating the last time you were together. He said you hit him a clip under the ear

that picked him clean off his feet and sent him head first into a piano; and that laid him out."

"You needn't say any more, Slick. You've got the call, all right. Now, what's the message? Tell me what message Red sent to me."

"He said I was to tell you that Morgan stock was booming, and that if you followed along a corkscrew trail from the northeast corner of a certain mud shack, you'd find the boodle. If you know what that means, it is more than I do, but that's the message he told me to give to you."

"It's all right, too. If you'd said that first you wouldn't have had to give me any proof that you came from Red. He sent that message, all right. Come over here with me."

"Where to?"

But Morgan did not reply. He was already leading Patsy toward Mulvaney, and when there, he said to the proprietor of the place:

"Slick is all right. He has proved it to me. I'm going to take him inside."

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER'S DRAMATIC ENTRANCE.

When Black Morgan announced to Mulvaney that he was going to take Slick—otherwise Patsy—inside, the boss of the place raised his eyebrows inquiringly, and replied:

"Will you vouch for him, Black?"

"I sure will. He brought a message to me from my brother, which tells me that he is all right, and when I get a message like that I know what it means."

"All right. Take him in and introduce him. Tell the boys that I passed him. I'll be in there with you in another half-hour."

And so presently Patsy was led through a passageway to that mysterious back room, where the police had never penetrated, and where only the initiated were supposed to be welcome.

By "initiated" we do not mean that no one save the members of the Order of the Python were allowed there, for others did go there frequently; but none were allowed in there who were not known to be "all right" in the sense that they could be depended upon. One must have served at least one term in prison, to be welcome there, or at least to have committed crimes enough so that he should have served many terms.

When they were well inside the room and "Slick" had been duly presented to a choice few of the regulars, Morgan drew him to a table at one side of the room, and, seating themselves beside it, he said to Patsy:

"Now tell me all about it."

"All about what?" asked Patsy.

"How did you serve him? That message you brought to me told me that you had saved Red's life. I would like to know how you did it."

"I didn't save his life. If he said that, he told you more than the truth. I did save him from getting pinched; but that was all."

"That saved his life, for if he had been pinched, he would have had to do more than time. Didn't he tell you that he was wanted for a case of stiff, and that if the law got its grip on him he would be recognized, and so would have to do the passage through the little door?"

"No; he didn't tell me that."

"Well, you see now how it was that you saved his life. He also said in that message that you are all right. Now, tell me how you served him, and then I will have more to say to you."

So Patsy began again as he had begun with Nick, earlier in the day, and related practically the same story, although of course there were necessary changes in it. But when he had finished, Black Morgan understood that the man before him had shown unusual powers of grit and sand in tackling the coppers as he had done, and in saving Red Morgan from prison.

"You're a honey-cooler all right," he said, when the story was finished. "Why don't you join the snake-charmers?"

"You mean the organization that Red belongs to? He is going to propose me."

"When?"

"As soon as I get back to Boston; or, if I decide to remain over here, he has promised to come here and see me through."

"I wish he would come. What does he want to stay there for?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Well, if you'll promise not to think I am fresh about it, I think I could make a good and straight guess."

"Go ahead and make it."

"My guess would be that there are three or four or more branches or degrees to that order you are talking

about, and that Red wants to get higher; and that he thinks by remaining in Boston he can do it."

"You're a good guesser, Slick."

"So they tell me,"

"You talk good English, too. I shouldn't wonder if you had considerable education under your hat—eh?"

"I've got about as good as rich parents give to their sons."

"So! You were that, were you? Well, are you a good writer as well as a good talker?"

"That is part of my lay."

"What—that?"

"Yes."

"Are you an expert at it."

"It is my favorite pastime."

"You don't say! Say, you are just the man we are looking for. The chief——" He stopped, and a heavy frown gathered on his brow.

"What is the matter?" asked Patsy.

"I said something that reminded me of something else, and that made me hot. I've got a worse temper than my brother, and if you know him very well you will know what that means."

"I think I understand. But what was it that disturbed you just then?"

"You heard me mention the chief?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm mad at him, and I have no right to be so, I suppose. He is the chief, and he has the right to do as he pleases. But, all the same, he disappeared very mysteriously from his room down here, and I am worried as well as angry about it."

"Don't tell me about it unless it is something that I can listen to, but what is the matter?"

"He has disappeared, that's all."

"Maybe somebody has set a knife into him, or something like that."

"No; for if that had happened, there would be some trace of it. He was here, and he left us all in this room to go to bed. The next morning he was gone, and his bed hadn't been touched. He had promised, too, to see me early the next day."

"Perhaps he remembered something that took him away when he didn't have time to leave word that he was going."

"That is the only explanation. There was a man here at that time, who has run away since, and I'm worried about him, too. He was a cove called Cranky, because his mind was gone. He was about as bughouse as a chap could be and stay around anywhere. I suppose he has just gone and jumped in the river, although I'd give a good deal to *know* that he had."

"Did he disappear the same night?"

"No; not till several days after that. I don't think his going had any connection with the departure of the chief. But there was one that had."

"What! Another?"

"That's what."

"It strikes me that you fellows are slow. You have too many mysteries hovering about you for real, solid comfort. Who was the other one who disappeared?"

"A gun called Ruddy Mike."

Patsy bounded to his feet.

"Called *what?*" he demanded, sitting down again.

"Ruddy Mike. Do you know him?"

"Has he got a big, red scar on one side of his face? The right side? And is he the quickest man with his fists that you ever saw? But maybe you haven't seen him fight."

"Oh, yes, I have, and you have called the turn. That's him. Do you know him?"

"Do I know him! Don't I? Say, you don't know where I could find him, do you?"

"No, I don't. I wish I did. He went away the same night as the chief; or, rather, it was in the morning early that they went away. I have been wondering ever since if they didn't go together. But what do you want with him?"

"I want to land him one on the jaw! That's what I want with him."

"What, him? *You* land him one? Say, you couldn't touch him with a streak of lightning. He licked *me* in a square, stand-up fight, with the gloves; that's what he did. What have you got against him? Isn't he on the level?"

"He's on the level all right. He is the best friend I ever had, or rather he was that, until he served me a mean trick."

"What did he do to you?"

"He stole my girl away from me. I'll leave it to you if I'm not a better looking man than he is. Say?"

"Sure thing. He don't handsome a little bit; but, then, he has a way about him which makes one forget that he is so infernally homely. Do you know anything about him, Slick? I confess that I am mighty curious about that gun."

"I know a lot about him, if that is all."

"What do you know? Is he on the level? Is that straight?"

"It is. He is on the level. He wouldn't go back on a pal for anything. I happen to know that. Our difficulties are of no particular account. I'll have to go at him when I see him, and that will end it."

"Yes; by your getting licked. I can see that now."

"Well, I want to tell you this: If I should have the good luck to lick him; if I should hurt him so that he was laid up, he would remain just as much my friend as ever, and if you or anybody else should offer slack to me when he was present, you'd have him to tackle as well as me."

"If he's as good as that, I will feel easier."

"What were you feeling bad about, in his case?"

"You see, it was funny, the way he went away from here."

"What was funny about it?"

"In the first place, he made a getaway from Sing Sing, and he showed up here a total stranger. He had the secret of getting in here, too, and he showed up here as chipper as you please. He made himself solid with Mul, first off; then he made himself likewise with me, for beating me with the gloves. I held that nobody could do that, but he laid me out cold and stiff and did it as easy as rolling off a log."

"Well?"

"He was around here all right until the night that the big ones had a meeting here. He was in this room before the meeting was held, and he was in here again after it. Then he went to bed, some time in the morning. Well, it was that morning when the chief disappeared the way I have been telling you about."

"Yes."

"When Ruddy didn't show up that afternoon or evening, we sent to his room, and found that he had moseyed, too. Even old Cranky didn't know anything about when he went away; and him disappearing at the same time as the chief, looked queer."

"How did it look queer? I don't understand."

"It looked as though he might have been a fly-cop who had worked himself into this place and had moseyed away with the chief during the night, after the meeting. I said as much to Mul, mentioning that it might have been Nick Carter himself, but Mul only laughed at me.

"'You'll find that Ruddy is all right, when he turns up again,' said Mul; and sure, I have no doubt that I will; but all the same the events of that night have worried me some."

"Well, Ruddy is Ruddy, all right; I'll tell you that. I'd like to see him, not so much about that girl business as to ask him about that getaway he made from the prison. That was a corker. I read about it. It was just like him. He ain't afraid of anything, and he can do anything a little better than anybody else can do it. I say, *look there!*"

Morgan turned and looked in the direction toward which Patsy was pointing, and then he, too, leaped to his feet with what might be called a glad oath.

There, in the doorway through which he had just entered, stood the very man they were discussing—Ruddy Mike. But as we already know, it was Nick Carter.

He had deliberately walked into the lion's den.

CHAPTER X.

LIKE A SCENE FROM A PLAY.

Patsy remembered his instructions.

He had already partly prepared himself to carry them out in his conversation with Black Morgan; and now they both started forward together, for it was evident that Morgan remembered what had been said, and was bent upon preventing anything like a row at Mulvaney's.

But Patsy got ahead of him.

He was half-way across the room before Morgan was fairly started, and there was an expression in his eyes that meant business—at least, that was what was thought by those who noticed him.

There were perhaps a dozen men there who recognized in the man who had entered the room the Ruddy Mike of their acquaintance, and without exception they all started to their feet, showing thus that his sudden disappearance had really created more comment than had been uttered aloud.

But notwithstanding the fact that they all pressed forward, Patsy got in advance of them, and was the first to reach the detective.

Then, to the amazement of all—for there was not a man there but had heard how Ruddy Mike had defeated the great Morgan—he shook his fist in the newcomer's face and began to call him names.

But Ruddy Mike, equally to the astonishment of all, remained as he was standing, and instead of resenting the words that were thrown at him from Slick, he only smiled and continued to draw back out of his reach.

At last, when he got a chance through Patsy's torrent of words to put in one of his own, he drawled:

"Will two of you hold him? One can hold me."

There was a general laugh at this. Even Slick grinned rather sheepishly and partly drew back.

Then he turned to the others and said:

"I'll leave it to you fellows if I haven't a grudge against Ruddy."

"State your case, Slick," the detective said to Patsy; "and after you have done it, I will have something to say."

"Well, it was this way," began Patsy in his character of Slick. "Ruddy and me have been pals for a long time. We've stuck together through thick and thin; we was always willing to share whatever we had, or to put each other onto a good thing when one showed up. Have you got that down?"

"We have," replied Morgan, who had stepped to the front and was now acting as spokesman for the crowd.

"Well, that was the situation up to the time we parted, which happened just before Ruddy got himself pinched and was sent away to Auburn, where I supposed he was yet, until I saw it printed in the paper that he had escaped from Sing Sing."

"Go on. Get down to the facts of the case," said Morgan. "We know all about that."

"Well, I had a girl, who was a good pal of mine. She was about the slickest thing that ever happened when it came to doing a job good and fine. She wasn't my wife and she wasn't my sweetheart; nothing of that kind, you know; just a good pal, that one could depend upon all the time, and then some more."

"We're on," said Morgan. "Get along with your story, Slick."

"Of a sudden she pulled her freight and skipped. She didn't leave no word behind her, not so much as a good-by, or a go-to-the-devil-with-you. I asked Ruddy about her, and he gives me the double-cross in that he says he don't know anything about her, when all the time he did know.

"Wait a minute and I'll tell you how I know."

"Go on, Slick," said Morgan.

"Another gun that I knew well, who had been a pal of mine once on a time, says to me one day, says he, 'Ruddy's stole your gal away, ain't he?' 'How's that?' says I. 'I saw 'em together last night, jest afore dark,' says he.

"Well, I asked him where, and he told me. Ruddy was helping her out of a hack in front of a big building in Sixteenth Street, which he allowed was a church, and where he thought that Ruddy was taking her to marry her.

"Now, pals, that's the story. If Ruddy can set it straight, I'm willing to hear what he has to say about it, but the thing looks queer to me; as if he had given it to me two ways at once, and I'm not the sort of a gun to stand for that."

Morgan turned toward Nick.

"What have you got to say about that, Ruddy?" he demanded in a judicial tone.

"Why, this—and I hope yez'll all give me the same attention ye have devoted to Slick."

"We'll do that."

"Well, then, Slick's friend was correct. He did see me helping the girl out of a hack in front of a big building in Sixteenth Street. The only trouble is that the gun didn't know the difference between a church and a horse-pittle."

"What?" demanded Morgan. "Do you mean to say that the big building was a hospital?"

"It was the New York Horsepittle, which you all know is situated right there. The gal was sick. She had trouble with her lungs, and she stood it just as long as she could without ever telling Slick anything about it. At last, when she knew that she'd got to give up, she asked me to take her there, and made me promise that I'd never tell anything to Slick about it; and like a fool I promised. That's the story."

"Where is the girl now?" asked Morgan.

"Well, she was a good girl, with all her faults. Some of us goes to a good place, when we gets through, and some of us don't; but I reckon she found the way there. That's all."

Every man in the crowd was hushed.

With one accord they turned to look at Slick, but only to find that he had dropped upon a chair where he sat, staring at the sawdust on the floor, seeing and apparently hearing nothing.

Nick stepped quickly across the space between them and thrust out one hand.

"Give us your paw, Slick," he said, "I only did as she asked me to do, and you've got to forgive me for it. Give us your flip, old pal."

Patsy stuck out his hand and Nick grabbed it—and the others looked on in utter silence while the two appeared to cement anew their long friendship.

Of course, the whole thing was merely a bit of dramatic acting which the two detectives had prearranged between themselves; but it had the desired effect upon those who saw it, and it was a successful diversion from what might have happened in the way of embarrassing questions to the detective.

Those rough men respected Slick's silence, too; and Ruddy's loyalty; and one by one they pressed forward and said so; and then the scene was over for the time, and Ruddy and Slick were left alone at one of the tables, to talk over the facts of the seeming tragedy.

But they were not left by themselves for long.

Morgan could not stand the strain of his curiosity for a very long time, and presently he pressed forward, this time accompanied by Mulvaney, and the two drew up other chairs to the table with them.

"Ruddy, have you got a little time to devote to somebody else, now?" asked Morgan.

"That I have, Black," was the instant reply. "What do ye want?" Nick knew that the moment he had dreaded had arrived.

"Mul and me have been thinking that you owe us some sort of an explanation, provided you are willing to give it to us. If you don't see it that way, we will try to explain it to you so's you will."

"All right. I'm willing. What is it about, Black?"

"You flew the coop a little bit sudden, didn't you?"

"Yes—rather."

"We didn't think it was exactly polite."

"Maybe it wasn't; but, then, you see, I couldn't help it."

"Why not?"

"There was one who demanded that I should go; and that I should go without leaving any word. And I had to do it."

"Will you tell us who that one was, Ruddy?"

"I won't mention names, if that is what you mean."

"Can't you make us understand without doing that?"

"Mebby so."

"Have a try at it, anyhow, will you?"

"Yes."

"Well, we're waiting."

"I wasn't the only one who went away that time without saying good-by, was I?"

"No."

"Do you remember who that other one was, Black?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you guess that I went away with him?"

"We thought that might be the case."

"It was the case."

"Did you go away with him, or did he go away with you?"

"We went away together, and that's a fact."

With knowing it Nick had given a literal ritualistic answer to the question, and Morgan glanced quickly and furtively toward Mulvaney. After a moment he asked:

"Where is the other one who went away with you?"

"You will have to ask him that question, Black, if you want an answer to it."

"Is he safe?"

"A whole lot safer than you or I or these others here are at this minute. He's as safe as a church."

"In good health?"

"In perfect health, or was the last time I saw him."

"Will you tell me when you last saw him?"

"No; only this much: It was a few days ago, since he left here."

"He is in the city, then?"

"I told you that I wouldn't answer that question. I must not."

"Well, tell me this: Is he away on business?"

"He is away on about the most important business that ever came into his life, or that ever interested him. Will that do?"

"That sounds all right. But you will admit that it was a little strange, your both lighting out at the same time, when Mul and I didn't know that you even knew the other man."

"It was part of what I had to do. I was not to know him and he was not to know me."

"I see."

"Look here, Morgan—and you, Mul—I'll tell you this much. When I get orders, if they come straight to me, and from one who has the right to give them, I carry them out as nearly to the letter as I can do it."

"Nobody can kick about that."

"Nobody had better kick about it."

"We'll take your word for it, Ruddy."

"I haven't given you any word about it. Don't forget that. You have asked me a lot of questions and I have replied to them to the best of my ability; but if you'll stop to think it over, you'll agree with me that I have told you nothing. Now, if you and Mul have any kick coming after that statement, say so, and——"

"No, no. It is all right," said Morgan hastily.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER PLAYS A TRUMP CARD.

"There has been another mysterious disappearance since you went away, Ruddy," said Mulvaney, speaking for the first time.

"Is that so? Who?" asked Nick.

"Cranky."

"What! Cranky? Has he gone? What has become of him?"

"We don't know."

"Well, you know something about it, don't you?"

"Not a thing. He just showed up missing; that's all."

"Maybe he went down and jumped into the river."

"That's what we've been thinking—unless you could tell us something about him."

"I? What should I know about him?"

"Nothing, I suppose. Only we remember that he seemed to take an unusual liking to you, and we didn't know but that maybe you had induced him to go away with you, or that you had had some use for him, or——"

"Well, have you run through the list?"

"I guess so."

"I suppose he has gone off chasing one of his dreams. Poor old Cranky. I rather liked the old chap, too, and you can take my word for it he has seen better days."

"I guess there is no doubt of that," put in Morgan.

"Who was he before he came here?" asked Nick.

"I told you I took him on with the place," interrupted Mulvaney before Morgan could reply.

"But I thought that Morgan spoke as if he knew something about him," insisted Nick.

"Well, if I do—or think I do—I ain't telling it; not now," said Morgan.

"Oh, that's all right. I'm not the prying sort. But that old man has been a good deal of a man in his day, or I'm no judge. His language was of the best, and his manners, even in his dirt and rags, were perfect. I suppose that he has been swiped on the head, or drugged, some time in the past, and that he never got over it. Poor old Cranky! I hope that nothing has happened to him, although he would be better off dead, I'm thinking, than living as he was here. Don't you agree with me, Mul?"

"I do that, although I miss him sorely. He was a handy man about the place. I'm glad that you have come back, anyhow, Ruddy."

"So am I, Mul, even if I have returned to say good-by."

"What's that?"

"I am going to disappear again, and I don't want you to be worried about it this time."

"Same sort of business that you had the last time?"

"Precisely the same."

"Will you tell us where you are going?"

"I can't do that for the very good reason that the plans are not all perfected. I could not tell you, anyhow. It wouldn't do."

"I suppose not. When are you going?"

"That is undecided, too. Probably not before to-morrow night; maybe not so soon as that."

"When are you coming back again?"

"That is harder to answer than the other question. I don't know any more than you do about that part of it. I may return at any moment, and you may not see me again for a long time. But I want you to understand that if I disappear suddenly again, it is because it is my duty to do so—and I always do my duty."

"Oh, we'll understand that all right, now."

"What's new here, Morgan?"

"What do you mean by that question? It strikes me that you are a little better posted than we are about most things."

"I am about some things possibly; but not about general affairs. Has there been any stir to speak of since that other man went away with me?"

"You mean since you went away together, don't you?"

"That's what I mean, if you want to be so blooming particular."

"Yes, there has been a good deal of a stir."

"How so?"

"Well, we have thought all sorts of things about you. Some of us went so far as to wonder if you were not a fly-cop who had crept in here. We even guessed that you might be Nick Carter himself——"

"Why not the devil himself?" asked Nick, with a smile.

"It would amount to the same thing."

"I suppose so, as far as you are concerned. Well, what more?"

"Word has gone out about the affair, among some friends of ours—you know who," continued Morgan significantly, "and they sure got the creeps all through them. So much so that a lot of them are here to-night, and they are now up-stairs talking it——"

"Say, Morgan, what do you suppose I'm here for, anyway?"

"You can search me! That is what I've been wondering."

Nick leaned forward nearer to Morgan and whispered:

"Say, Black, who took Cranky's place to-night?"

"I did."

"You took 'em up-stairs as he used to do, did you?"

"Yes."

"How many short of the twenty-seven are up there now?"

"A good many. There are only nine here. There wasn't time——"

"I know that. Nine, eh? There should be more than that, though."

"They are still expecting one more. Maybe you are that one." The last remark was made with a rising inflection, as if Morgan really thought that Nick must be a member of the third degree, and therefore the one who was still expected up-stairs.

But Nick only grinned at him, leaving him to answer the question in his own mind as he saw fit. He whispered again, even lower than before:

"Is the other domino at the door, Black?"

"Yes. Is it waiting for you?"

"I expect, my good friend, that it is waiting for me," replied the detective in even a lower whisper.

Those who remember the time of the arrest of Pollock will recall the fact that there were two men made prisoners that night—Pollock and the man whom Nick impersonated in gaining admittance to the room where the meeting was held.

From the latter, who had been kept separated from Pollock, Nick had gleaned a great deal of valuable information, and among other things were the answers to many of the questions that were necessary in order to get into the room.

The way in, after he had donned the domino, he knew. Cranky had supplied him with all the information in his possession; and now in his reply to the question asked by Morgan, Nick had managed to incorporate the real answer to the question, which was: "It is waiting for me."

Morgan left his chair instantly.

"Will you go up now?" he asked; but Nick held up a warning finger, and replied:

"Sit down, Black. I'll tell you when I am ready."

"You could bring that meeting to a close in about a minute, I expect," whispered Morgan.

"I expect I could, Black."

"All you've got to do is to go up there and tell them what you know, and that will end it, and it strikes me that that is what you ought to do."

"Perhaps I am doing as I'm told. As I understand it, they are there, considering ways and means to find out where a certain friend of ours is at the present moment. Now, I'll leave it to you. If that friend happens not to want anybody—not even them—to know where he is at the present moment, and if I have been sent here, *not* to tell where he is, but to prevent the others from doing anything rash, what do you think would be the best course to pursue?"

"Is that a question? Are you asking me for my advice, Ruddy?"

"That is precisely what I am doing."

"Then I should say, let 'em stew a little while, and wait as you are until they come down here again. I can find out for you then, what has been done, and I can let you know. That will give you a chance to make up your mind how to act. Maybe I'm taking a good deal for granted," he added, after an almost imperceptible pause. "But what is a fellow to do under the circumstances? You have as good as proved yourself true to me, although you haven't done it in quite the regular way. But it amounts to the same thing."

"Right you are, Morgan."

"Then is it your idea to sit right here where we are till they come down?"

"Yes."

"I take it that you don't want them to guess who you are?"

"Certainly not."

"All right. I'll pass the word around, and do it in the right way, too. And you can leave all the rest to me."

"All right, Morgan."

"Say, Ruddy!"

"Well?"

"On the level, I'd give my two eye-teeth to get up in the third."

"I don't doubt it."

"Don't you think you can help to fix it so that I can get it?"

"Possibly."

"Will you try?"

"I'll tell you what I will do, Morgan."

"Well, what?"

"I'll promise you that you shall be put through the third degree before you are a month older—and maybe a whole lot before that."

"Honest Injun? Do you mean that?"

"I never was more in earnest in my life."

And Nick never was more in earnest, although as the reader has guessed, he did not mean the same third degree as the one to which Morgan referred. It is well known that the police have a process for extracting information from a prisoner, which they facetiously call the third degree, and it was to that which the detective referred.

The time was already past two in the morning, and Nick knew that the meeting up-stairs could not last much longer, for the very good reason that those who were there attending it would have nothing to keep them.

They had gotten together for the purpose of passing upon the strangeness of Pollock's disappearance, and no one knew better than the detective that there would be no information, from any source, about him for any one to relate at the gathering.

That he was correct was presently proved, for it was not long after that before one of the doors at the side of the room opened, and then, one after another, nine men walked solemnly in and seated themselves at various tables.

They wore the air of weighty things; it was as if they were a committee of the United States Senate, just met in solemn conclave, and it was with difficulty that the detective repressed a smile.

But he knew that they were troubled.

He knew more than that; for he knew that before the sun set upon another day they would be even more troubled than they were now, and that many of them, if not all, would be behind the bars.

It was only those men—and Morgan—that he wanted, and now he thought he saw his way clear to get them all.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST OF THE CRIMINAL TRUST.

The detective had not come to Mulvaney's Cover unprepared for emergencies, and now he found occasion to utter an expression to Patsy which had been previously agreed upon between them, after which he turned back again to Morgan.

The signal conveyed in the expression that the detective had used was precisely the same as if he had in so many words directed Patsy to leave the place as soon as he could possibly do so without attracting attention and without arousing any suspicions; and to have the men in readiness who were waiting outside to be of service to him whenever they should be wanted.

For Nick had not been unmindful of the fact that it might be necessary for him to make wholesale arrests, and that the moment to do so might arrive at almost any time.

It is true that it had come more quickly than he had expected, for he had figured that he and Patsy, in their disguises as Ruddy Mike and Slick, would have to remain at least two nights under the roof of Mulvaney's Cover, and possibly a week or even more.

But events had played so rapidly into his hands, and had grouped themselves so advantageously for his purposes, that he found himself almost at once at the climax of the case, and realized that this night, if ever, the arrests must be made.

He wanted Morgan, as we know, because he had identified him as one of the abductors of Cranky. Pollock, another of the abductors, was already in prison.

Morgan was busy passing the "word" around, as he had said he would do, and during this interval Patsy succeeded in getting out of the room without being observed.

It wasn't long after that before Morgan strolled over to where Nick was sitting and said to him as he dropped into a seat beside him:

"Well, Ruddy, I've found out what you wanted to know."

"All right," said Nick. "What is it?"

"They didn't do a single thing at the meeting. As far as I can find out, they just sat there and stared at each other, for the reason that nobody had a word of advice to offer or an explanation of the mystery to suggest, and now they're just as much up a stump as ever, and haven't a single idea what to do."

"Then, Morgan," said Nick, smiling, "I think it's up to me to set them straight, don't you?"

"I do that, Reddy."

"Are you willing to help me do it?"

"Sure I am."

"If I ask you to help me, or, rather, permit you to help me, will you obey orders without asking questions?"

"I certainly will."

"I mean it literally, Morgan. You must do precisely as I tell you, no matter how strange it may seem, without asking a question about it, or I shall be obliged to call upon some one else to assist me."

"I'll do as you say, all right. You needn't worry."

"Very good. Now, is there a vacant room at the front of the house on the second floor?"

"Sure there is."

"Then my orders are for you to go to that room and light it. When you have done that, return here and take me to the room. When that is done and you have left me there, you must come back here and pass the word around to the nine men that there is something doing, and that some information is to be imparted to them. After that you will take them one by one—it doesn't matter who comes first or who comes last—and bring them in that way to the room, where I will be awaiting them."

"I begin to understand what you're up to now," said Morgan.

"You may as well understand exactly what I'm up to if you want to. It's this: I've got a message for each one of the men who attended the meeting to-night. Those messages must be delivered individually and separately. As fast as they are delivered, each man will leave the place and go back to his own city, where he will report what is told him where it will do the most good."

"I'm on," said Morgan.

"Very good. Now go and fix the room, and then come back for me. After that carry out my orders as I have given them to you."

It was not long after that before Nick Carter found himself seated in the room that Morgan had prepared for him, awaiting that individual's return with the first one of the nine men to be interviewed; and Nick Carter worked rapidly while he waited.

His first move after the door closed behind the departing Morgan was to remove the inside shutters from one of the windows, raise the sash, throw open the outer blinds, and peer out into the darkness, uttering a low whistle peculiarly drawn out as he did so.

The whistle was answered from the street, and a moment later Patsy's voice called up softly to him:

"All right, chief."

The detective gave a few hurried orders out of the window to his assistant. They were:

"There is a fire-engine house around the corner of the second street from here. Send one of the men here with a short ladder which will reach to this window. Have the other two men wait underneath the window with you for him to bring it back, and when it is in position at the window, let them remain at the foot of it while you come up here into the room with me; but don't come up the ladder into the room, or don't put the ladder against the window until I signal you to do so."

He turned back into the room then, closing the inside shutters but leaving the sash raised and the outside blinds open.

And he was only just in time, for immediately thereafter a rap came at the door. It was pushed open, and a man was thrust through it into the room by Morgan, who immediately departed.

Nick stepped forward quickly and closed the door and turned the key, and then, while this man who had come there expecting to obtain information, stood looking at him with expectation and alarm both indicated by his attitude and expression, the detective calmly took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and, extending them toward the man who faced him, said:

"Snap these on your own wrists. I am Nick Carter, and you are under arrest."

The man was so thunderstruck by the information so coolly delivered, that he stood perfectly helpless while the detective snapped the irons upon him.

As soon as that was done, and while the man was still in a half-dazed condition, Nick opened the shutters again, knowing now that there would be plenty of time—for he had told Morgan to wait fifteen minutes after bringing one man before he brought another—and he found the man with the ladder was just arriving in the street below.

In a moment more it was placed at the window, and Patsy had mounted it, followed at Nick's request by two of the men; and so the first prisoner of that night was presently carried down the ladder into captivity, while Nick and Patsy waited together, with the shutters once more closed, the arrival of the second victim.

He came, and after him the third, and the fourth, and the fifth, and so on until Morgan, one after another, had delivered the whole nine precisely as he had agreed to do, but, of course, with no idea whatever of what he was really doing.

Some of these men struggled; most of them did not. Two of them fought, and one was subdued and captured

with great difficulty, but all alike fell victims to the two detectives who waited them in that room, and all were eventually passed down the ladder into the hands of the policeman waiting below, and once in the street they were conducted quickly away to the station-house to await further consequences.

When the last man had been delivered into captivity, Nick left the room long enough to descend into the great room on the first floor, where he signaled to Morgan that he wanted him; and the unsuspecting Morgan followed the detective straight away through the halls and up the stairs to that room on the second floor where so much had happened in so short a time.

As he stepped into the room, following the detective, he started back with a cry of alarm, and then uttered a roar of savage fury, for he found himself confronted by three stalwart policemen in uniform, as well as by a man whom he knew as Slick and by Ruddy Mike in person.

He was so completely taken by surprise, that, strong man as he was, before he could offer any resistance, the officers and Patsy had leaped upon him, borne him to the floor, and bound him.

Then, helpless and so infuriated that he could scarcely speak, he glared up at his captors in a spirit of sullen madness.

"Morgan," said Nick, stepping forward and standing over him, "you have guessed by this time who I am."

Morgan made no reply, only the expression of his eyes told of the fury he felt.

"I have come here, Morgan," continued the detective, "with the intention of breaking up forever the Order of the Python, and I think that with to-night's work I will have about consummated it. However, there is more to be done, and that it shall be done you may be sure.

"But, Morgan, I have other business with you than that which applies to the Criminal Trust, which is the name the police have given to your Order of the Python.

"If you will answer the questions I ask you, and they won't be many, it will go a great deal easier with you than if you refuse to aid me. Now, listen to what I tell you:

"Seven years ago the ninth day of August last, you and Pollock lunched together at the Café Savarin in the Equitable Building with a man named Henry Clay Parsons. When the luncheon was finished, you enticed Mr. Parsons into a carriage and drove away with him, and while you were in the carriage he was drugged or struck [illegible] with a weapon of some sort, [illegible] that moment he disappeared.

"Nothing has been known of that man, Morgan, since that time until I discovered him here living under the name of Cranky; living the life of a slave with his past almost totally forgotten; entirely so save for a few times that he remembered his daughter had sung to him.

"I know that Pollock sought to marry the daughter of Parsons. I want you to tell me now if he succeeded."

"No, he didn't."

"Do you know where that daughter is now?"

"Yes; she's living in the old home up near Riverside Drive."

"Do you know that she is there now?"

"I don't know, but I suppose she is."

"Now I want you to tell me what was done to Parsons. Did he receive a blow on his head that made him lose his mind, or was he drugged?"

"Pollock hit him with a cane he carried. We thought he was dead, and we kept him under cover for the rest of the day, and then chucked him in the river. Years later he turned up here as Cranky, and neither Pollock nor I have ever been sure whether it was Parsons or not, but you say it is, and I suppose you know."

* * * * * * *

This ends the story of the Criminal Trust. It only remains to be told that Henry Clay Parsons was very soon restored to his daughter and once more under the care of physicians and surgeons he was restored completely to his former brilliant condition of mind. During the seven years that had elapsed since his mysterious disappearance his daughter had never given him up; she had always believed that one day he would return, as he did, through the instrumentality and by the kindness of Nick Carter.

Just one more word. Red Morgan, of Boston, was induced to come to New York, and through his assistance, as has already been outlined, Patsy joined the Order of the Python in his impersonation of Slick, and was not long in obtaining all its secrets. The result may be surmised. Its chiefs were known and arrested wherever they were found, and the Criminal Trust, as it existed at that time through all the great cities of the country, was done away with forever.

THE END.

The next number (571) will contain "Tried For His Life; or, Patsy's Terrible Ordeal."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, November 30, 1907.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(*Postage Free.*)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

1 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
3 months	65c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

ORMOND G. SMITH, GEORGE C. SMITH, *Proprietors.*

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

A factory at which $2, $10, and $20 bills were turned out that none but an expert could say were not the product of the treasury printing-office in Washington, was seized by secret-service men recently.

It was a Queen Anne cottage in Cornelius Street, East Rutherford, N. J., ten miles from Jersey City, on the Erie Railroad. There, unsuspected by their neighbors, two men and a pretty young girl carried on their work of defrauding the government.

That they have deceived even experts is shown by the fact that their product has been found in at least one bank in Hudson County, taken in by the unsuspecting receiving-teller.

The discovery of the complete printing-outfit from which no man can say how much bogus paper money has gone out to the country was made through the capture of the "layer down"—that individual so necessary to such an establishment, who takes upon himself the task of foisting upon the public the output of the counterfeiters' den.

He was captured in Hoboken, this "layer down." He is Richard P. Ganzer, a man forty years old. Hoboken is the Mecca, and always has been, of the fellow with bogus money, just as Jersey City is the home of the green-goods man.

Bogus ten-dollar bills flooded the town to such an extent that some storekeepers would not take a bill of that denomination, good or bad. Ganzer tried to change one on Thursday night and failed. A man in the store accommodated him.

"That's one of those bad bills, maybe," the storekeeper suggested. The Samaritan bill-changer turned pale and went in pursuit of Ganzer on general principles. He caught him, and the bill was bad.

In Ganzer's pockets they found nineteen bogus $2 bills, three tens, and one of the denomination of $20. They were amazingly good counterfeits.

"Much better than considerable of the money that circulates around Hoboken," said Chief Hazen, of the secret-service bureau, who was sent for. He had been after the producers of it for about a year. Bank-tellers and tradesmen of New Jersey had made life a burden to him for months.

Mr. Hazen is an old-timer at the bogus-money business. So is Ganzer. The keen government official smoked his cigar and questioned the "layer down." He might as well have cross-examined a safe.

Then Mr. Hazen, with the aid of some of his men, undressed the prisoner. They searched every stitch of his clothes as with a microscope. They slit the soles of his shoes, examined his hair, ripped the lining of his coat. All the while the man sat there, silent, calm.

In one pocket they found the deeds of a mortgage on a house in Rutherford and a bank-book of the People's Bank and Trust Company, of Passaic. Chief Hazen, with some of his staff and several Hoboken policemen, took the next train to Rutherford.

They went to the house in Cornelius Street referred to in the mortgage. Chief Hazen smiled to himself at the carelessness of a "layer down" of bogus money who would make the mistake of carrying with him a scrap of paper with a name and address on it.

The men walked in twos until they reached the cottage. Then Chief Hazen gave a signal. Men went behind it and at the sides with their hands on their revolvers. The chief walked rapidly up the walk to the steps. A middle-aged man sat near the door in his shirt-sleeves smoking his pipe.

He suddenly looked up and was about to rise when he heard a click and saw a revolver—saw it plainly—for he was looking down the muzzle.

"White hands you've got," the chief cried. "Let's see them—throw them up!" and Hazen saw the hands.

Treasury Agent Henry put the handcuffs on him and took his name—Paul Jansen, aged thirty-nine. It is alleged that he was the printer of the fictitious currency.

Just then a pretty fifteen-year-old girl came running down the stairs. Chief Hazen told a policeman to watch her. She said she was Clara Ganzer, the daughter of the "layer down."

"And stop that crying, sissy," he added. "We shall need you only as a witness."

Then they searched the house. It was a fine haul they made, and Chief Hazen chuckled. In a desk in the parlor was a package of 122 bills of $2 each, every bill of them bogus; 47 "fake" $10 bills, and one genuine $10 bill.

They broke open a trunk on the second floor, and in a starch-box inside found counterfeit bills, twos, tens, and twenties, done up, most of them, in packages of $100. The grand total was $5,780.

But the grandest prize of all was yielded up by a room in the basement. Here the officers found a complete printing-outfit. There were two lithographic presses of fine make, for it takes the best machinery to imitate the printing of which Uncle Sam is so proud. Lying on end against the wall were found four lithographic stones, on which had been photographed the lines for a $20 gold certificate, a $10 gold certificate, and a $2 silver certificate.

There was a good supply of ink, black, red, green, blue, and the rich orange used on the gold yellow-backs. But most surprising of all was the paper. It resembled exactly, to the eye of the non-expert, the paper used by the government craftsmen in Washington. Where did they get it? Chief Hazen looked grave. He was mysterious about that paper. It was the one topic that he did not care to speak of. Some who saw him believed he suspected that it might have been stolen from the carefully guarded vaults of the government.

In running such a plant, each man has his "station." The agents figured that Richard P. Ganzer was the "head devil" of the concern and the "layer down," while Jansen did the printing. How many more were in the concern may never be fully known.

A celebrated naturalist tells of a dog he once possessed which, when given a piece of bread that he did not care to eat, dropped it, and then, lying upon it, pretended to look round with the most innocent air, as if wondering where it had fallen.

Another case he speaks of is that of a terrier whose greatest pleasure it was to catch flies on the window-panes. Nothing annoyed the animal more than to be laughed at when he missed his prey.

In order to discover what he would do the naturalist purposely laughed immoderately each time he was unsuccessful.

At last he was so unmistakably annoyed that in his despair he pretended to capture a fly, and made the appropriate movements of tongue and lips, after which he regarded his owner with a triumphant air.

So well had he played his little comedy that had the gentleman not seen the very fly still on the window he certainly should have been taken in by this trick.

When he called the dog's attention to the fact that the fly he had chased was still at large and that there was no dead fly on the floor, he perfectly understood that his hypocrisy had been discovered, and was so ashamed that he slunk away and hid under a couch.

NELLIE WILD.

BY FRED VERNON.

We will try to adhere, as closely as possible, to the language of the old detective as he told the story, one evening, about a year ago, to a party of us who were gathered around the stove in the office of Tom S——.

"Well, boys," said old D——, after lighting a cigar and smoking a few moments in silence; "well, boys, as you know, I have been honored with a position on the detective force of this city for a good many years, and during the time I have had a right smart sprinklin' of adventur', mixed with some danger and romance—enough, I should say, to fill a pretty good-sized book! And now I'm goin' to tell ye about a little adventur' that I had nigh on to five years ago this fall.

"One fine day I was out sunnin' myself on Broadway: as I was walking along slowly, a little beauty came tripping past, and, oh, gracious! I never set eyes on as pretty a little figger in my life as that little piece of furniture in the calico line was; and it wasn't calico, either—she was dressed up splendidly in silks and velvets. I don't know why it was, but I couldn't keep my eyes off of that girl, for she didn't look like anything else but a girl. I judged she was about eighteen or thereabouts. Well, I determined to follow her, and see where she was flying to so fast; when she stopped I stopped, and then she would hurry on as though her life depended on her reaching some place very soon. I followed her to Reade Street, when she turned the corner. Wondering what business a little wax doll like her could have down there, I followed pretty close at her heels. She stopped on the corner of Reade and Greenwich, and looked around. Fearing that she might see me, and suspect I was followin' her, I dodged into a store for a moment, feeling very sheepish. I hastened out, but I couldn't see my divinity. I went to the corner, and looked up and down the street as far as I could see, but the game was lost, and I turned to walk up the street, feeling very much as if I had been caught in my neighbor's hen-roost. As I turned, however, something in the gutter glistened in the sunlight, and I stooped and picked up a tiny diamond ring—a jewel of the first water. The letters 'N. W.' were engraved on the inside of the ring; and I jumped at a conclusion—the ring belonged to my little Broadway fairy, and N. W. were the initials of her name.

"Well, nothing wonderful about that, you say. Just wait a bit. You see the ring was her property. She would advertise it. I would read the advertisement, return the ring, and, of course, have a chance of getting acquainted with N. W., whoever that was.

"These thoughts made me feel first-rate, and, putting the ring in my pocket, I went toward home. I'm an old bach, boys, but the moment I saw that girl I lost my heart, and when I saw a chance for becoming acquainted with her, I felt happy, and went my way rejoicing.

"The next morning an advertisement appeared in the *Herald*, under the head of 'Lost: A diamond ring, etc.,' and concluding, 'the finder will be liberally rewarded, and receive the thanks of the owner, by leaving it at No. —— ——th Street.'

"'Now's my time,' says I; and I started for ——th Street on the spot. On arriving at the number given in the paper, I found a house in which, to all appearance, some of the 'upper ten' resided. I rang the bell, and a negro woman answered it. I inquired for her mistress, and she invited me into a magnificently furnished apartment, while she called:

"'Miss Nellie!'

"Nellie, then, was the name of the beauty I had seen. But I had no time for thinking, for I heard a footstep in the hall, and the next: 'My mistress, sir;' and the woolly pate of the wench vanished, while, with grace in every motion, Miss Nellie Wild advanced, and, in a low, musical voice, inquired:

"'To whom am I indebted for the honor of this visit?'

"I gave her my name, and then stated my business.

"The ring was hers; she offered me a large reward, but I refused it; and she then made me promise to call on her often, and consider myself one of her intimate friends. I did so, and, after a short conversation, took my leave.

"I came right up-town to this office, and, while sitting here, indulging in a good smoke, Jim R—— came in with a five-dollar bill in his hand, and, coming up to me, threw the bill in my lap, saying as he did so:

"'There, D——, that is the best counterfeit I ever saw.'

"I took the bill and examined it. It was a perfect photograph—a counterfeit. A bank officer himself could hardly have detected it had it not been for the size of the bill itself—it was a trifle larger than the genuine when the two were placed side by side.

"'Where did this come from, Jim?' I asked.

"'I have traced it to S——, the dry-goods man,' Jim replied. 'I went down there yesterday, and one of his clerks recognized the bill as one he had taken last Tuesday from a young widow. He had noticed the bill pretty closely, as it appeared as if it had recently been issued. Now,' said Jim, 'you know all that I do about the bill, and, as I have a job on hand, I want you to go to work on this lay, and trace it to the end, and if you want assistance, Ben R—— and Joe H—— will lend a hand, as they are now idle.'

"So saying, Jim went out, leaving the counterfeit with me. I sat and thought some time, and then concluded to go out on Broadway in the afternoon and see what I could discover. I didn't find out anything more about the bill for four weeks, when early one afternoon, at the end of this time, I was on Broadway again. As I sauntered slowly along past ——th Street, who should come tripping out around the corner but Nellie Wild. I had called often at her house, and had become quite intimate with her. She had told me her father and mother were both dead. They had died when she was a mere child, and, removing from the South, where she was born, she had resided with a wealthy widowed aunt, who had died a year or two before, leaving her the possessor of immense wealth, pretty, educated, and accomplished, and only twenty-one years of age.

"This, in brief, was her history, and I believed it to be true. Well, to return to my story. On this afternoon she looked lovelier than ever. It was a bright December day, quite warm for the season, and as she tripped along in front of me she looked like a June rose, so fresh and smiling, I quickened my pace in order to keep her in view, for something kept my eyes riveted on the fairy form glancing in and out among the crowd of pedestrians, who were out for business or pleasure this bright afternoon. I followed her down near Prince Street, where she began to walk slower, and looked around as if expecting some one. I was curious. My interest was more fully awakened when a man dressed in black, and wearing a Spanish cloak and slouched hat, made his appearance, coming out of Prince Street, and, after gracefully raising his hat, joined her, and together they walked down Broadway, conversing in a low tone, I should judge, as their heads were very close together.

"They appeared to be very much in earnest, and I determined to watch them, for, to tell the truth, boys, I was jealous of that good-looking fellow by the side of Nellie. They walked along, and finally arrived at the Jersey City ferry. I followed them, at a little distance, to the boat. They went on board into the ladies' cabin, and began a very earnest conversation, which, as it was carried on in a foreign language, I could not understand. Slouching my hat, I watched them as close as a cat would a mouse. The boat touched the bridge, and as the man rose to leave the boat he took the hand of Nellie, and, pressing it to his lips, I detected a note passing from his to Nellie's fingers. I made it my business to follow the Spanish-looking gentleman, for it struck me that I had seen him somewhere before, under very suspicious circumstances. He walked up two blocks from the ferry, very leisurely, and I followed about half a block. All at once he stopped, turned around, and came down the street at a rapid pace. I stepped into a paper-store, purchased a paper, while he was passing, and then followed him. He went to the railroad ticket-office and purchased a ticket for Newark. I did the same, and, as chance would have it, I procured a seat right behind him.

"Arriving at Newark, he turned up C—— Street, and, after walking several blocks, turned a corner, and as I came up to the corner he disappeared down an alley. I crossed over on the other side of the street, and secured a good position directly opposite the alley, in the shadow of an old building, where I could see every person that came out.

"By this time the lamps were lighted. He stayed in the alley about half an hour, when he came out, and a man with him. They walked up to the corner together, and I was on the point of going out, when they crossed over and came directly down toward me, on my side of the street. I sprang in the doorway, thinking I had been discovered, and, satisfied now that they were desperate characters, I resolved to defend myself, if necessary, to the last. But they did not see me, and, stopping not five steps from me, they carried on a, to me, very interesting confab.

"'I say, Mark,' said the strange man to my ferry-boat friend, 'have you seen Jane to-day?'

"'No,' was the reply; 'but I saw Nell this afternoon, and she saw Jane yesterday.'

"Is it possible, thought I, that Nellie Wild is in any way associated with these villains?—for I was sure they were villains, and mean ones, too. But to the conversation.

"'Tom,' said Mark, addressing the other, 'I think the boys had better suspend a few days. Nell said that Jane told her that old S——'s clerk looked at a V she gave him about four weeks ago very sharp before he took it. Jane just told her this yesterday; and that was what she wanted to see me for this afternoon. The bill, I believe, is in the hands of the detective police, and so Jane has been pretty quiet some days back. We must suspend a while, or there will be a devil of a row. But I'm not much afraid of any of the police dogs tracking us over here, though, or to our laboratory, either—eh, Tom?'

"'I guess not,' said Tom.

"And now for the conclusion, said I to myself. These men are counterfeiters, and 'Jane' 'shoves' the bills for them.

"Mark looked at his watch, and, seeing the time, hastily bade Tom good evening, and started for the railroad-depot. Again I dogged his steps to the depot, to Jersey City, across the ferry, up Cortlandt Street to Broadway, then up to ——th Street, where he proceeded down the street to Nellie's home.

"Ringing the bell, he was ushered into the house. I looked at my watch. It was not so very late. I had called on Nellie at as unseasonable hours as this. I would call. I stepped to the door, rang the bell, and was ad-

mitted by Nellie herself, who warmly welcomed me, and invited me into the parlor, where I was introduced to Mr. Sinclair, who was none other than 'Mark,' the villain I had followed all the afternoon. He looked like a gentleman. His features were regular and finely cut; the lines around the mouth were expressive of a determined will, slightly inclined to stubbornness. His eyes were full and black, small and piercing; his forehead broad, showing a high order of intelligence. Altogether he was quite a fine-looking man; but, after all, there was a certain something about him that stamped him as a villain. I don't know what it was, but it was there, in every motion, every word, every look. We entered into conversation on various topics of interest, and time passed very rapidly. It was 12 P. M., and no motion to go had yet been made by Sinclair or myself. I arose, and, bidding Nellie and her companion good evening, went to the door. As I reached the hall door the bell rang. I opened the door, curious to see who Nellie's later caller was. As I opened the door, Nellie recognized her visitor as 'my pretty Jane.'

"Ah! here was another link. I looked closely at Jane as I passed her on the stoop. She was a small, rather well-formed lady, dressed in deep mourning, with a widow's veil over her face, therefore it was a matter of impossibility for me to judge of her facial attractions. I crossed over the street, and waited for something to take place.

"In a half-hour the door was opened, and Jane and Mark came out, and proceeded toward Broadway. I followed in the shade of the buildings. They crossed Broadway at Eighth Street, and, going through to Third Avenue, Jane took an up-town car, while Mark took one going in an opposite direction. While he was waiting for a car, I walked down to the Bowery, and, crossing over in order that I might see which car Sinclair took, I stood on the corner, and waited until the car came along, and then jumped on the front platform.

"Sinclair stopped the car at Grand Street, and hurriedly walked away west. I followed with a great deal of difficulty, as there were no persons on the street, and I was in danger of being discovered by my game. He soon turned a corner into Crosby Street, and I followed as fast as possible. He disappeared into a crazy tenement, and went to the third story. I heard him unlock a door, and I picked my way carefully up-stairs. I reached the third landing, and, seeing a light shining through the keyhole, I looked through. There sat Mark, with bills of different banks and various denominations, lying ranged on the table before him. I could see but little, however, and I concluded to listen. He was counting over the money.

"'Eleven thousand! Pretty good!' he muttered; and then gathering up the bills, he put them in his pocketbook, saying:

"'I wonder who that fellow was that called on Nell this evening? I think I have seen him before; perhaps it's all fancy, though. Nell said he was a friend, so I s'pose it's all right. Well, I believe I'll go get a good stiff horn, and then retire.'

"He rose and came to the door; I drew myself back against the wall, and his clothes almost touched mine as he passed me. As he stooped to lock the door, something fell from his pocket right at my feet; he didn't notice it, however, and passed down-stairs, humming an opera air. I stooped, and, feeling along the floor, felt a piece of paper. I took it, put it in my pocket, and, while Sinclair had gone after his liquor, I left for home. Arriving at my boarding-house, I examined my prize. It was a letter, written that very day, by Mark Sinclair, to one Bob, of Buffalo, giving him all the necessary instructions for finding the workshop, as the letter called the place where the 'trash' was manufactured.

"I lay down and slept soundly until nine o'clock in the forenoon. The letter stated that they should work the next evening, and then they would rest a while; therefore I had no time to spare, so I jumped up, put on my clothes, took my breakfast, and set out in search of Ben R—— and Joe H——. I found them without much difficulty, and we formed our plans for the capture of the whole gang. We then separated, to meet at nine o'clock in the evening at the corner of ——th Street and Broadway. At the time appointed we were on hand, and waiting until twelve o'clock at night we proceeded to No. — ——th Street, where we found a posse of men under Sergeant W——, ready to act in concert with us. I took the lead through the alley, up a rear stairway into a rickety old carpenter-shop, where we halted at a door. I rapped three times, slowly and distinctly. A small wicket in the door was then opened, and a man's voice was heard:

"'What's wanted?' was the question.

"I answered according to the letter:

"'Medicine.'

"'How much?' again.

"'Five dollars' worth.'

"'You shall have it,' said he, at the same moment opening the door.

"I struck him with my club, and he fell without saying a word. He was securely ironed, and we proceeded down a staircase some distance until we were stopped at another door. Again I rapped, this time six times, clearly and slowly, and this time we heard a female voice asking:

"'What are you after here to-day?'

"I replied:

"'Pho.'

"'Who?' she said.

"I answered:

"'To-graphy,' forming, you see, the word photography.'

"At this the door was swung open, and we rushed in. The first thing I heard was the quick, sharp report of a revolver, and at the same time a stinging sensation in my shoulder. I was shot, and by Nellie Wild! She opened the door, as she occupied the post of inside sentinel.

"The whole party, except Nellie and Jane, were secured, six in all. The two women made their escape through a secret passage, afterward discovered by one of the men, leading into the rear of Nellie Wild's house.

"I have since learned that she left the city that very night with a noted sporting man.

"In the house occupied by Nellie Wild, alias May Bennett, we found a complete stock of dies, implements for the use of counterfeiters, etc.

"My wound was slight but somewhat painful, but I never fell in love with a gay, dashing, Broadway fairy after my experience with Nellie Wild, who was a daughter of a Southern blackleg.

"Boys, my yarn is spun; good night." And old D—— left.

THE NICK CARTER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

No other detective stories are half as interesting as those that appear in this publication. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest numbers from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang; or, Nick Carter and the Yeggman Queen.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Crafty Foe.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights; or, Nick Carter and the Temple of Vice.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double; or, Patsy's Terrific Brain Storm.
546—Three Against Fifteen; or, Patsy's Splendid Courage.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers; or, Nick Carter Prevents a Great Crime.
548—A Dead Man at the Feast; or, Nick Carter's Very Slender Clue.
549—The House of Secrets; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Vigil.
550—The Lost Bank President; or, Nick Carter Takes a Great Big Chance.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot; or, Nick Carter's Three Assistants at Work.
552—The Dare-devil Crook; or, Nick Carter Finds a Promising Clue.
553—A Mystery From the Klondyke; or, Nick Carter's Double-headed Case.
554—Returned From the Grave; or, Nick Carter's Legally Dead Client.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Ranch; or, Nick Carter Against the "Brown Chet" Outfit.
556—A Bad Man of Montana; or, Nick Carter's Chase of an Outlaw.
557—The Man From Arizona; or, Nick Carter Swims to Victory.
558—Kid Curry's Last Stand; or, Nick Carter in Dangerous Surroundings.
559—A Beautiful Anarchist; or, Nick Carter's Bravest Act.
560—The Nihilist's Second Move; or, Nick Carter's Timely Interference.
561—The Brotherhood of Free Russia; or, Nick Carter's Beautiful Friend, Olga.
562—A White House Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Case For The President.
563—The Great Spy System; or, Nick Carter's Promise to the President.
564—The Last of Mustushimi; or, Nick Carter's Narrowest Escape.
565—Secrets of a Haunted House; or, Nick Carter's Fight With a Ghost.
566—A Mystery in India Ink; or, Nick Carter in Search of a Secret.
567—The Plot of the Stantons; or, Nick Carter Prevents the Theft of a Fortune.
568—The Criminal Trust; or, Nick Carter's Mysterious Client.
569—A Syndicate of Crooks; or, Nick Carter's Great Prison Plot.
570—The Order of the Python; or, Nick Carter Works the Third Degree.
571—Tried For His Life; or, Patsy's Terrible Ordeal.

If you want any back numbers of this publication and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.